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BAKEWELL









# ADMONITORY COUNSELS

ADDRESSED TO

A METHODIST,

ON SUBJECTS OF

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE AND PRACTICE.

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BY JOHN BAKEWELL.

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REVISED BY THE EDITOR.

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## PREFACE.

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AT a time when the press is teeming with religious publications, it seems requisite to offer some apology for adding to the number.

The author of the following pages has for some time been under the conviction, that a work was needed which could be placed, as a guide, in the hands of the members, especially the junior members, of Methodist societies.

To ensure the efficiency of a system, it must not only be well adapted to its proposed end, but its component parts must be clearly understood, and its true spirit faithfully carried out. To promote these objects, in reference to Methodism, is the design of the writer. Whether the attempt be a successful one, must be decided by those to whom the contents of this volume are more immediately addressed.

Conscious that his only aim is to become the humble instrument of rendering his readers increasingly holy, and useful, and happy in the church of God, the author commends his work to the blessing of Him without whose sanction the best-devised and best-intended schemes are vain.

J. B.

CHESTER, *Dec.*, 1840.

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# ADMONITORY COUNSELS.

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## CHAPTER I.

### ON THE NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF A THOROUGH CONVICTION OF SIN.

AN open profession of religion is the unquestionable duty of every sincere Christian. In the present state of the world the only mode of properly making this profession is, by being united to some religious society. He who forms such a union will, if actuated by right motives, give preference to that denomination which most nearly meets his own views in matters of doctrine and of discipline, and toward the ministers and members of which he can cherish a cordial and respectful attachment. A union based on such principles will, in all probability, be permanent; and, if rightly used and appreciated, will be productive of the happiest results.

The persons for whose benefit this little book is specially intended have selected the Methodists, as the people in connection with whom they will confess Christ before men. As Methodists of every section are distinguished from other communities by certain peculiarities of

sentiment and of usage, my design is to offer a few counsels which shall at once recognise these peculiarities, unfold, in some measure, the privileges which they confer, and enforce the obligations which they involve.

Those who have but lately begun to receive the weekly instructions of a leader constitute the interesting class of persons to whom I wish, for the present, more particularly to address myself. May I bespeak your candid, your serious, your prayerful attention? In presuming to advise you, I trust that the advancement of God's glory is my principal aim; and in subordination to this, I feel that I am prompted by Christian sympathy and affection toward you. My object is to encourage you to persevere in the course upon which you have entered; at the same time to warn you against dangers to which you will be unavoidably exposed, and to direct you to that source from whence strength and wisdom are to be derived. Let me beg of you to look up to God, that by his blessing this effort may be rendered instrumental in establishing you in the faith, and perfecting you in love.

In the commencement of your religious course, it is of supreme importance that you obtain right views of yourself as a sinner in the sight of God. Our Lord speaks of stony-ground hearers, who, though they "receive the word with joy," yet "endure only for a time." They run well for a season; they give promise and raise expectations of usefulness; but in a while they return to their former habits

of ungodliness, and drink even more deeply than ever into the spirit of the world. Why this instability? The causes of it are various; but it very frequently arises from the want of an adequate conviction of guilt. There is no fruit, because there is "no deepness of earth," in which the seed of the word can take root, and maintain its hold on the heart. There being, in the first instance, no depth of conviction, there is, in consequence, no decision of character. There may be slight and transient emotions; there may be some indications of seriousness, and even of sorrow; but these may exist when there is no sense of the intolerable burden of sin, nor any clear perception of that depravity which reigns in every unrenewed mind.

Far be it from me to add to the anxieties of those who are already sorrowing to repentance; but I cannot divest myself of the fear that many religious inquirers are falsely reconciled to the absence of strong convictions of sin, by the well-intended but erroneous encouragements that are frequently administered. When one who is favoured with some measure of spiritual light complains that his impressions are not sufficiently strong, nor his sorrow for sin sufficiently deep, he is told, perhaps without further inquiry or discrimination, that God is gently drawing him with the cords of love, and therefore does not visit him with those distressing apprehensions of which others are the subjects. Such a statement may be true, and therefore

may be applicable to the individual to whom it is addressed. But it may be otherwise. It may be, that instead of being soothed and quieted, the inquirer needs to be directed to those means and considerations which, by more powerfully awakening his conscience, will impart earnestness and decision to his efforts. In advising those who profess a desire after salvation, it can seldom, if ever, be wrong to enforce the necessity of a deep and humbling conviction of sin. Be it also remembered, that *every* one who is drawn to Christ, is drawn by the cords of divine love ; so that whether the penitent be agitated with terror, or melted into sorrow, his conversion is equally an act of infinite mercy. Neither is the sinner drawn only by the cords of love : he is also guided by the light of truth ; and whenever truth shines into the heart, it lays open the depth and power of its depravity. Nor is it easy to conceive of any human being entering in at the "straight gate," and exercising "repentance toward God," who does not painfully feel the burden of his sin, and who is not both grieved and humbled by the recollection of his ingratitude and rebellion. Be assured of this, that unless you so feel your sinfulness, as to mourn on account of it, a thorough and permanent change of heart can never be experienced. One cause of the formality, lukewarmness, and hypocrisy which too evidently exists in some religious professors, and of the apostacy which we deplore in others, is, that they have never been

subdued and heart-broken under a sense of their vileness ; they have never had the convictions of the publican, constraining them to cry out, " God be merciful to me a sinner."

Be determined, therefore, to acquire such a knowledge of the nature of sin as will render it the object of your abhorrence. By searching the Scriptures you will find it represented as an evil of awful and incalculable magnitude. Sin is the transgression both of the moral and of the evangelical law of God : it is therefore nothing less than open rebellion against the divine government ; it opposes itself to the justice and benevolence of the divine character ; it debases the dignity and destroys the happiness of man ; it pollutes his nature and ruins his soul. Contemplate sin as the source of these appalling consequences. View it in all its deformity, till your heart loathes it, and swells with indignation against it. Ponder also the melancholy fact, that *you* are by nature the subject, the slave, of sin ; that *your* heart has hitherto been the welcome abode of this tyrant ; and that *your* life has been submissively governed by its dictates.

Try yourself by the first great commandment of the divine law, which requires you to love God with a supreme and constant affection : this equitable requirement you have never once obeyed ; this first great duty you have never once performed. From the moment of your becoming accountable to God, you have therefore, by your disobedience to this one

commandment, been incessantly accumulating guilt upon your conscience.

Not only have you withheld your heart from God, you have also repeatedly been influenced by selfishness, envy, unkindness, and resentment toward your fellow-men. And though the world may regard your conduct as unexceptionable, yet, if you are taught by the Spirit of God, you will be painfully conscious that you have never for one moment felt that pure, ardent, and universal benevolence which is enjoined in the comprehensive precept, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

But this is not all. Your transgressions of the moral law have been committed under circumstances which render those transgressions peculiarly aggravating. You have been favoured with gospel light, and with Christian ordinances; but this light you have resisted, these ordinances you have disregarded. Mercy has been repeatedly offered to you, but you have spurned the offer; Christ has been preached to you, but you have rejected him; you have heard of his infinite love, but you have refused to be softened by its influence; the efficacy of his atonement has been announced to you, but you have treated the announcement with strange and criminal indifference.

Such are the reflections that will occupy your mind, if you be the subject of saving conviction. You will feel that ingratitude, impenitence, and unbelief, constitute the essence and

enormity of your guilt. Your recollections of the goodness of God, of the sufferings of Christ, and of the strivings of the Spirit, contrasted with your own disobedience, will so vividly exhibit to you the evil of sin, and the depravity of your heart, as to fill you with self-abhorrence, humiliation, and sorrow.

Whatever may be the degree of conviction which you feel, do not, I beseech you, trifle with its warnings; whether your impressions be feeble or powerful, do not, by levity and unwatchfulness, weaken their influence; let neither the loss of worldly friendship, nor the sacrifice of worldly pleasure, nor the endurance of persecution, prevent you from acting with decision and earnestness in the pursuit of salvation. If you extinguish the light that is within you, an awful state of darkness and insensibility will be the consequence; the Holy Spirit, expelled from the heart which he designed to make his home, may abandon you for ever, and leave you to reap the fruits of your insatiation throughout a dark and dismal eternity.

In thus urging upon you the importance of a *deep conviction of sin*, let me caution you against supposing that the depth of your convictions can invest you with any claim to the divine favour. Conviction, of itself, furnishes no ground of confidence toward God, though it is necessary to prepare and fit the mind for the reception of gospel privileges. The pardon of sin will be most earnestly sought after, and most cordially welcomed by him who most

acutely feels the burden of his guilt ; sanctification will be most highly appreciated by him who has the clearest insight into the depravity of his own heart ; and communion with the Father will yield the richest joy to him who is most painfully sensible of his natural alienation from God, and of his enmity against him.

Sincere inquirers after salvation are frequently anxious to ascertain what amount of godly sorrow is necessary to constitute them real penitents. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to give a definite answer to such a question. It may, however, in general terms, be observed, that where there is such a desire after the blessings of redemption, as leads to the immediate abandonment of every sin, to frequent and wrestling prayer, and to a diligent use of all the other means of grace, there are satisfactory indications of genuine penitence,—of a penitence wrought in the heart by the Spirit of God. And as he is the Author of conviction, he will, if his influences be cherished, and his dictates obeyed, carry on his own work, and pour that divine light into the understanding which shall reveal the sinner's danger and the Saviour's glory ; a light which shall shine more and more unto the perfect day.

I cannot dismiss this subject without reminding you that the sorrows of conviction are essentially different from the agonies of despair ; nor must the latter be substituted for the former. It is possible for a person to have alarming apprehensions of the wrath to come, without



loathing and humbling himself before God on account of his sins. Do not, therefore, imagine that a foretaste of hell is necessary to render you a true penitent. You cannot indeed feel yourself a sinner without in some measure feeling the condemnation of sin; but, if your repentance be genuine, it is not the condemnation of sin that chiefly occupies your thoughts, but its defilement, its ingratitude, its opposition to God. You mourn over it, not only because it deprives you of God's favour, but because it unfits you for his service.

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## CHAPTER II.

### JUSTIFICATION—FAITH—ASSURANCE.

I AM now about to address you on subjects which, if you are athirst for salvation, you will deem of unspeakable interest and importance. You need scarcely be informed of the necessity of obtaining correct views on the doctrine of justification by faith, and also of securing a personal interest in that great blessing. To be in error on this subject, is to be in danger; inasmuch as it enters into the very essence of the Christian's hope, and supplies the only efficient motives to acceptable obedience. Doubtless your opinions on justification may be orthodox, while the practical influence of

those opinions is unfelt; nevertheless it is obvious that the comforting and hallowing effects of this doctrine cannot be experienced unless your knowledge of it be sound and Scriptural.

In attempting to define justification, it may be observed, that it consists in the sinner's deliverance from that condemnation which sin has brought upon him, and which he justly merits. As the wrath of God abideth on him who believes not, so when by faith he is justified this wrath is removed. In the act of justification that sentence which dooms the sinner to eternal perdition is repealed, withdrawn, and blotted out. When a person is justified, he is accepted of God, received into his favour, and made the object of the divine complacency. Thus justification essentially includes the free forgiveness of sin. Indeed, the terms justification, pardon, and forgiveness, as they are used in the Scriptures, obviously mean one and the same thing. This great blessing, therefore, consists, not only in a deliverance from all liability to punishment for past sin, but in being also constituted an heir of everlasting glory.

That you may be rooted and grounded in this doctrine, let me exhort you to read the Bible, especially those portions of the New Testament which dwell on the design of the death of Christ, and on God's method of justifying sinners. Pray that the Holy Spirit would open the eyes of your understanding, that you may have a spiritual discernment of the things

of God, and that you may be guided into all the truth as it is in Jesus. It will, at the same time, be your privilege and your duty to avail yourself of such helps for the right understanding of the word of God on this subject, as have been furnished by men who, though not inspired, have, we believe, been taught by the Holy Ghost. You may read with great advantage Mr. Wesley's and Dr. Bunting's discourses on justification; which, in my humble opinion, give in clear and forcible language the true sense of Scripture on this all-important doctrine. Let your inquiries be pursued, not in the spirit of cold speculation, nor for the purpose of satisfying a vain curiosity; but let your object be to secure reconciliation with God, and to have your confidence fixed on that foundation which is laid in Zion.

Important as it is that you should rightly understand the nature of justification, it is of infinitely greater importance that you should experience its vital, saving influence. I will therefore now address myself to you on the presumption that you are anxiously proposing the inquiry, "What must I do to be saved?" and that you are determined not to rest,—that you feel you cannot rest,—until you are assured of your acceptance with God.

You are seeking to be justified, and the gospel informs you that you are to be "justified by faith." If, indeed, you were required to bring any personal righteousness as the ground or condition of your justification, the blessing

could never be yours. You feel this to be true. Instead of dreaming that your obedience to God's law can either merit or procure his favour, your most decided and painful conviction is, that you have no obedience to offer. Your conscience, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, testifies against you, that you are altogether sinful. And it is as a sinner, conscious of your guilt, not as a righteous character, that you are to come to Christ for salvation. Even your penitence you cannot rest upon as a foundation of hope; because, involving as it does the discovery of your utter destitution of all spiritual good, its consequent results are the renunciation of self, and the exclusion of every plea, of every ground of hope, except the great atonement. Throughout the universe a more monstrous contradiction cannot be found than that of a self-dependant, self-justifying penitent. "Believe, then, on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Believe *immediately*. The trembling jailer was not told to defer the exercise of his faith: he was commanded to believe, and that without delay, although but a few minutes previously he had attempted to commit suicide. If, therefore, you are earnestly proposing the jailer's inquiry, you are not to wait till your convictions are stronger, nor till you are more deeply humbled under a sense of sin. If you are longing to be free, if you are athirst for salvation, if you feel your need of Christ, you must come to him just as you are. You must come to him with all those corrup-

tions of which you are conscious, and over which you mourn ; you must come with all that impenitence, pride, and hardness of heart of which you complain. Instead of considering these evils as reasons for delaying your application to Christ, you must regard them as furnishing the most powerful motives for the *immediate* exercise of faith. By a believing view of the cross, the impenitence which grieves you will be removed ; the pride that harasses you will be abased ; the hardness of heart that discourages you will be melted away. In the cross there is a power which gives a death-blow to every corruption ; and an attraction which despoils sin of its fascination, and concentrates the soul's affections on God and holiness : there is in the cross a glory, the rays of which banish those clouds of spiritual darkness that oppressed the sinner ; substituting for them the light of God's countenance, and the hope of heaven. This moment, then, look to Jesus with confidence ; look to him for a present salvation. The fountain of his blood is always open ; it is open for sin and for uncleanness ; and as the efficacy of that blood is infinite and perpetual, so also are the ability and willingness of Christ to save you even to the uttermost.

Let me caution you against expecting an assurance of pardon before you have exercised faith. Such an expectation is both unscriptural and presumptuous ; and yet many, instead of struggling against unbelief, look for a sudden and overpowering communication of the divine

presence, and imagine that, until thus favoured, they must continue in darkness and in bondage. That such manifestations are promised, is unquestionable; that they are enjoyed is equally certain. But they are promised to faith; and are enjoyed only by those who have already believed. It is by "believing we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." It is God's prerogative to impart consolation, it is your duty to believe; and before you can receive an assurance of pardon, you must exercise faith in the atonement. First, believe; and then, and not till then, shall the "Spirit itself bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God."

But you will probably ask, What is faith? How am I to believe? Such questions are often proposed by penitents: they are questions which generally indicate a state of painful embarrassment, and frequently occasion protracted distress. Faith has been defined as a simple belief of the gospel testimony. Admitting the correctness of this very general definition, the next question which naturally arises is, What is the gospel testimony? Some have asserted that it is the statement of facts and the system of truths which the gospel reveals to us; and that faith is a firm persuasion of the certainty of these truths, and of the reality of these facts. This is true as far as it goes; but it does not go sufficiently far to meet the necessities, and remove the anxieties under which you labour. You already have this firm persuasion of the

truth of the gospel, and yet your conscience is unrelieved of its burden.

The gospel testimony includes a number of facts and truths, individually exhibiting their distinctive features, but all together constituting one harmonious and divinely arranged system. It is not unreasonable, then, to suppose that these facts and truths are severally intended and adapted to benefit man under his varied circumstances, feelings, and modifications of character. Is there not, therefore, some one part of this testimony, some one object which it places before us, which is pre-eminently calculated, yea, especially designed, to direct and comfort the inquiring penitent?

Now one part of the gospel testimony is, that "Christ died for the ungodly;" and some have affirmed that justifying faith is nothing more than simply believing this or some other proposition of the same import. But you already believe this; nevertheless you are still in bondage. Your faith, though it include the death of Christ in its objects, is even yet of too general and of too vague a character to bring you the satisfaction after which you are seeking. It is not enough for you merely to know that "Christ died for the ungodly;" because this declaration, when compared with other passages, might have signified that Christ died only for a select number of the ungodly; and had it been so, there would have been no warrant, no ground whatever, for relying upon him as *your* Saviour. No invitations, however

unlimited, no entreaties, however urgent, could rationally justify you in reposing your confidence in Christ, unless there be satisfactory grounds for believing that you are one of the ungodly "for whom Christ died."

The object of which you are in pursuit is an assurance of your personal interest in the death of the Saviour: the only ground upon which this assurance can rest is the declarations of God's word. It is true, you will not find your *name* in the sacred book, connected with the statement that you are one for whose benefit the atonement was offered: but your *character* and *condition* as a sinner are described; and whatever is affirmed to have been accomplished for every sinner was, of course, accomplished for you; it is therefore designed for your encouragement, and is, on your part, a legitimate object of appropriation. Let us, then, endeavour to ascertain what the word of God testifies, and whether it does not authorize you to believe that Christ died for *you*.

The apostle Paul, speaking of Christ Jesus, calls him "*my Lord*;" and in another epistle, naming him by his title of Son of God, he adds, "who loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*." Each of these passages exhibits an act of appropriating faith. Was this appropriating faith a privilege conferred exclusively on the apostle? Certainly not. In this respect he was placed on the same level, and bound by the same conditions as every other Christian believer: and the persuasion which he felt was



not a privilege peculiar to himself and the rest of the apostles ; it was common to all the faithful followers of Christ. As a development of Christian experience, it is not to be regarded as a standard placed immeasurably beyond our reach, but as an example which we are required to imitate ; as indicating a state of mind to which all may attain, and the blessedness of which all may realize.

In order to evince to you that the confidence expressed by the apostle may be as boldly exercised by you, let me direct you to declarations which, from their explicitness and universality, ought at once to remove hesitation and to banish doubt. The word of God asserts that Christ “gave himself a ransom for *all* ;” that “he tasted death for *every* man ;” that “he is a propitiation for the sins of the *whole world*.” Such is the gospel testimony ; and if faith consist in believing this testimony, then, in order to exercise this faith, you must believe that Christ has given himself a ransom for *you*, that he tasted death for *you*, and that he is a propitiation for *your* sins.

If, then, your conscience is burdened with the load of its guilt, in order to obtain relief you must, with firm confidence, cast yourself on the atonement of Christ for pardon, cherishing the certain conviction that he is both able and willing even now to save you to the uttermost : you must from your heart believe that all your iniquities were laid upon the Son of God ; that “he bore them in his own body on the

tree;" that he "loved *you*, and gave himself for *you*," and that consequently he will now give to *you* "redemption in his blood, even the forgiveness of all your sins." This is justifying faith: in order to exercise it you must make a vigorous effort. Make the effort now. Try *at this moment* to believe, and to apply to yourself the passages you have just read. They are plain and intelligible; they are the statements of eternal truth; and you are required to believe them exactly in the same manner that you would believe any other proposition, of the truth of which you are certain. Faith is not enveloped in that mysteriousness and difficulty which some imagine it to possess. Its simplicity is its essential characteristic. It is its simplicity, too, at which multitudes stumble, and from which they take occasion to excuse their continuance in unbelief: they cannot divest themselves of the impression that faith is the performance of some mighty and almost impracticable achievement; whereas it is nothing more than *the awakened sinner* giving full and entire credit to the plain and unequivocal testimony which God has given of his Son.

The act of believing will, of course, be more or less energetic and intense, accordingly as you feel the importance of the proposition believed, and as you perceive its bearing on your own interests and happiness. The immediate effects of faith will also be proportioned to the vigour with which it is exercised, and to the strength of previous convictions. If you, then,

conscious of your guilt, believe with due energy and intenseness, that "Christ was crucified for your sins," and that you "have redemption in his blood," you will "have peace with God," as a direct and necessary consequence. You will indeed discover that there is an intimate connection between the exercise of faith, and the possession of peace. How, indeed, can the sinner any longer groan under the burden of his guilt, when he has the persuasion that Christ has borne that burden for him? How can the self-condemned penitent expect the curse of the law to be his doom, when he believes that Christ "has redeemed him from that curse, by having been made a curse in his stead?"

By thus showing the connection which naturally exists between the exercise of faith and the attainment of peace, let it not be said that the agency of the Spirit, as "the Comforter," is denied; nor that the necessity of that agency is lessened. The heavenly peace which calms the sinner's conscience is one of the fruits of the Spirit, and therefore the gift of God. But God, in the bestowment of his gifts, requires, on our part, the use of means which he himself has appointed, and which are also adapted to their end. God, in all his dispensations, acts *rationaly*, not arbitrarily. There is a congruity in the operations of grace, as well as in the operations of nature. When the penitent sinner believes that portion of the divine testimony which is more directly applicable to his

case, God gives to that testimony a vitality and a power which render it effectual. Through its medium he communicates the blessing which it unfolds and promises; and thus the pardoned rebel, while reflecting on the process through which he has passed, regards the acquirement of his peace as a direct effect of pardon, and the bestowment of it as absolutely divine.

If, on believing that Christ has borne all your iniquities, you nevertheless feel destitute of that comfort which you were led to expect, it will, in this case, behoove you to examine yourself, and to inquire whether you are determined to renounce every sin, and to sacrifice every object that may interfere with your salvation. Are you certain that you are not endeavouring to compromise matters between God and your soul? Is there no darling lust which you wish to retain? no questionable practice which you are unwilling to relinquish? Be assured of this, that nothing but a prompt surrender of your whole heart to God can secure his acceptance of it. If there be not a determination to crucify every lust, and to abstain from every transgression, your faith, however strong and undoubting, will be utterly unproductive of those results which are promised to the sincerely penitent believer.

Should your conscience, however, testify that the prevalent desire of your heart is to be cleansed from all sin, then let me exhort you to continue in the exercise of that confidence

to which you have attained. Do not murmur if you do not immediately feel the ecstasies of joy; be thankful if you feel the calmness of peace; and if even this be not experienced, still hold fast the precious declaration, Christ has loved *me*, and given himself for *me*. Cling to the cross as your safe and everlasting refuge, and say, "If I perish, I will perish HERE." Believe that there is an infinite efficacy in the blood of Christ, and that it availed for you,—yes, even for *you*. The faith which in its commencement may be feeble and unsteadfast, will, by repeated exercise, be invigorated and established. That this may be the result, contemplate the objects of faith: the more clearly you perceive the magnitude and glory of the object, the more implicit and abiding will be the confidence that you will feel. Let your thoughts dwell on those perfections of the Redeemer which pre-eminently qualify him for the work which he has accomplished. Meditate on his infinite power, faithfulness, and love. Meditate on the immaculate holiness of his nature. Remember that, invested as he was with the attributes of Deity as well as of humanity, his death could not fail to answer the end for which it was designed; that it was voluntarily submitted to by him, and accepted by the Father as a sacrifice for sin; that it consequently was an actual atonement for human guilt; and an atonement offered by a Being of such dignity and perfection could be nothing less than infinite in its efficacy, and therefore universal in

its extent. Accompany these meditations with frequent and wrestling prayer: at the footstool of mercy plead the blood of sprinkling, plead the promises of pardon. God has never yet violated his word: be assured that he never will. Persist in prayer, persist in believing; and speedily the darkness shall pass away, your bonds shall be loosened, your sorrows shall cease, and light, and liberty, and joy shall take possession of your soul.

The preceding remarks will tend, I trust, to relieve the minds of those who are so oppressed with a sense of guilt as to imagine themselves excluded from mercy, and whose prospects for eternity are darkened by the overpowering influence of despair. To yield to despair is to dishonour the gospel, and to ruin your soul: it is to believe the false and malignant suggestions of the father of lies, and to disbelieve the solemn assurances of the God of truth.

When you see your guilt in all its aggravation, it is not to be wondered at that you should feel distressed, and even discouraged. But to renounce hope, to refuse consolation, is not merely irrational—it is criminal. Trembling penitent, look to the cross. If no other human being has equalled thee in the number and magnitude of thy sins, if thou hast gained the dreadful pre-eminence of being the vilest transgressor the earth ever nourished, still thou art not beyond the reach of mercy: for thy encouragement I would remind thee of the divinely attested fact, that Christ Jesus came into the

world to save not only sinners of an ordinary class, but to save even the "CHIEF."

Let it be supposed that your rebellion has been perpetrated under circumstances which mark your conduct with peculiar baseness ; let it be granted that you have gone to the furthest possible extreme in reckless and ungrateful opposition to God ; yet, if you are willing to be reconciled, he is willing to pardon. If you doubt his willingness, you do him an injustice ; an injustice against which he remonstrates : "Come now let us *reason* together, saith the Lord : though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Do not suspect God to be guilty of falsehood, but believe that he is sincere when he says that he "is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance ;" that he "wills that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth." If you cannot take his word, you will surely credit his oath : "*As I live*, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked."

If indeed your guilt had been greater than all the guilt which has been contracted by all the generations of men, from Adam down to the last of his descendants, even then there would have been no rational ground for despair. The unequivocal promises of the gospel, and the ample provision which it unfolds, would have been more than adequate to such an emergency. Though your sins were more numer-

ous than the atoms which compose the material universe, though they were blacker and more horrible than the crimes which give to hell all its darkness and pollution, they could not surpass the efficacy of that atonement; for that efficacy is infinite: they could not extend beyond the reach of that intercession, the prevalence of which is omnipotent.

There is not an argument, however plausible, by which you may attempt to justify your unbelief, which is not answered, refuted, and silenced by the explicit, unquestionable, and glorious declaration, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from ALL SIN." Believe this, despairing penitent; believe it *for thyself*. By thus believing, thy condition cannot be rendered worse: it may, it will be rendered better. Try the experiment. Struggle to be free. With one bold effort venture to cast thy soul on Jesus; on him "who is able to save thee to the very uttermost;" on him who has said, "Him that cometh unto me *I will in no wise cast out.*"

From what has been said, it will be obvious that justifying faith is your own voluntary act: nevertheless, in the exercise of it you need the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Faith is an effect of the Holy Spirit's influence: it is therefore "the gift of God." But in what sense is it a divine gift? Not surely in such a sense as to render us merely passive machines in believing; which, in fact, involves a palpable contradiction.

The agency of the Spirit is designed not to supersede our own exertions, but to rouse, in-



vigorate, and direct them. Faith is "the gift of God" in the same sense, and to the same extent, as meekness, patience, gentleness, &c. These, along with faith, are declared to be "the fruit of the Spirit." But no one, savingly enlightened, will on this account conclude that he is freed from the obligation of *striving* to be meek, patient, and gentle; neither, while diligently cultivating these heavenly graces, will he imagine that he implants them in his heart, and develops them in his conduct by his own unaided power. Thus it is with faith. It is your duty to endeavour to believe; and while making the effort, it is your privilege to look up to God for the influence of his Spirit, that your understanding may be illuminated, and that your heart may be opened to receive the truth. God bestows faith by removing spiritual insensibility, darkness, and pride; by imparting right views of the plan of salvation; by giving a clear discernment of the glories of Christ, of the sufficiency of the atonement, and of the certainty of the promises. "By the Spirit" the penitent is "strengthened with might in the inner man:" in the power of this might he rests on the atonement, and relies on the promises for his personal and present salvation.

I cannot close this chapter without expressing my fears that there are many who join Methodist societies, and who continue for years in church membership, who never obtain, who do not even earnestly seek an assurance of pardon. Either they are never thoroughly

awakened to a sense of their danger ; or they allow the impressions of their sinfulness to become extinct ; or they satisfy themselves with good desires and resolutions, and with the observance of religious duties ; or they perhaps suppose that their constitutional temperament does not admit of their living in the enjoyment of gospel privileges. Reader, do you belong to this class of persons ? Are you neither enjoying nor earnestly seeking a clear sense of the favour of God ? And in this state of spiritual deadness are you united, or are you about to be united to a Methodist society ? If such be your state, it is truly awful. Yes, yours is an awful state. Either you are a hypocrite or a self-deceiver. Either you have assumed a religious profession without any desire after salvation, or you are falsely reconciling your mind to the absence of one of the most precious privileges which the gospel confers. Compare your spiritual attainments with the standard of God's word, and you will discover that to experience the cleansing and peace-giving efficacy of the blood of Christ, to feel the Holy Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, are blessings placed within the reach of all ; blessings which all are *required* to possess, and to secure which every one ought to labour with assiduous and persevering energy.

In wilfully continuing destitute of the witness of the Spirit, you are as a Methodist strangely inconsistent. The inculcation of this doctrine

was a striking peculiarity in the labours of the Wesleys and their coadjutors ; and their successors have ever considered themselves bound to give it prominence in their discourses. In neglecting to realize this blessing, you are therefore resisting all the appeals and considerations by which your ministers urge its attainment upon you ; you are chargeable with acting in opposition to your professed principles, and you are pursuing a course which, if continued, will conduct you to that state of false security in which you may have “ a name to live,” while you are in reality “ dead.”

Admitting that you are sincere, but that you have hitherto been mistaken in your views of Christian experience, remember that you can now no longer plead ignorance as your excuse. Having been informed of the nature, and warned of the consequences of your error, it cannot now be *innocently* entertained. If indeed it still retain its darkening influence over you, you will be guilty of “ receiving the grace of God in vain.” Religion is designed to make you happy ; but you cannot be religiously happy while unpardoned sin remains upon your conscience. Religion is designed to make you useful ; but you cannot be religiously useful unless you love God. You cannot love God unless you know and feel that he has first loved you. So long, therefore, as you are destitute of the Holy Spirit’s witness of your adoption, you are wanting in those qualifications which are essential to a cheerful and acceptable obe-

dience to the divine commands. 'The obedience that you may attempt to perform will be partial, fluctuating, and heartless ; it will be the constrained service of a slave, accompanied by a spirit of bondage and of fear ; while its contaminating influence will diffuse a spirit of lukewarmness among those of your fellow Christians who may be so unfortunate as to share in your intimacy.

If then you value your peace, if you value your soul, be determined never to rest until you have obtained a clear evidence of pardon. Let no one persuade you that the privilege is either unimportant or unnecessary. Let neither the devices of the devil, nor the sophistries of men, nor the sluggishness of your own nature, deprive you of this invaluable blessing.

Reader, is this remonstrance inapplicable to you ? I mean, are you a hypocrite ? Is it true that you have dared to enter the church of God without feeling one good desire, without forming one holy purpose ? No language that I can adopt can give even the faintest delineation of the folly and wickedness of your conduct. The most fertile imagination is incapable of forming any thing like an adequate conception of the dreadfulfulness of that punishment with which you will be visited, if you persist in your present course. To describe your doom I will not, cannot attempt. I will only remind you, that of hypocrites it is said, "outer darkness" will be their everlasting habitation ; and weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth their per-

petual employment. Ponder, I beseech you, the awful threatenings of divine justice. Be sincere. Flee to the cross. Give your heart to God, and he will give himself to you.

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## CHAPTER III.

### ON SANCTIFICATION.

I SHALL now, my dear reader, consider you as having exercised that faith by which you are justified, and in consequence of which you have peace with God. Being freed from the condemnation of sin, and having a vivid perception of its deformity, you are, perhaps, ready to conclude that it has taken its final departure, and that it will never again either distress or alarm you. While I would not needlessly cast a damp upon your spirits, Christian fidelity requires me to admonish you, that you are not, from your present happy feelings, to infer that the work of salvation is completed: the most arduous and important portion of it is only commenced.

Having obtained the blessing of justification, you must now labour after sanctification. In a measure, you are already sanctified. Your heart is changed; you hate sin; you love God. Nevertheless, you feel your need of a higher state of purity. This necessity of a more entire purification will be felt the more strongly,

as you become better acquainted with yourself, and with the lofty and spiritual requirements of the gospel. Nor must you allow your mind to be overwhelmed either with astonishment or despair, if you should shortly feel the workings of inbred corruption. It is more than probable that you will be harassed by wandering thoughts, and chilled by cold affections; that unholy desires and evil tempers will struggle for the ascendancy; that you will have to complain of short-comings in devotion, and of lukewarmness and unfaithfulness in the service of God.

In your happiest and holiest state of feeling you will, indeed, lie prostrate at the footstool of mercy, acknowledging that you are an "unprofitable servant," and regarding yourself as "less than the least of all saints." This kind of humiliation is, however, widely different from that which arises from the conscious and wilful neglect of duty, or from the allowed prevalence of lukewarm affections. The humiliation which is felt under such circumstances is necessarily attended with doubt, self-condemnation, and discouragement; while that which is cherished by the faithful follower of Christ is connected with a clear manifestation of the divine favour, and is perfectly consistent with the highest confidence, and with the most abundant joy.

It is not to be expected, that in the commencement of a religious course, there should be all the maturity and strength of a more ad-

vanced stage of religious experience. Faith, in its first exercises, is frequently feeble and fluctuating : so long as this is the case, consolation cannot abound. Hope will be mingled with fear. Sin, though it will not absolutely reign, will painfully harass ; so much so, that at times the young convert may be led to doubt whether he has ever been made a partaker of the grace of God.

Whatever may be the peculiarities of early religious experience—whether faith, in its commencement, be feeble, or whether it be vigorous—it is plainly the duty of every one who professes attachment to Christ, to press after the highest attainments in holiness. He who is born of God, and who has received the Spirit of adoption, hungers and thirsts after righteousness. He is impelled to the pursuit of it by the hallowing influence of the cross, and by the constraining power of divine love. The cross has given him so strong an impression of the evil of sin as to cause him to loathe it, and instinctively to seek its extermination from his heart. The love of God in the bestowment of pardon has so affected him, that, from a principle of gratitude, he feels bound to consecrate all his ransomed powers to the service of Him who bought him with his blood. As a natural consequence, therefore, of his reconciliation to God, he struggles for an entire freedom from sin, and aspires after a perfect conformity to the divine law.

It is in this entire freedom from sin, and in

this perfect conformity to the divine law, that perfected sanctification essentially consists. It is supreme love to God, and universal benevolence to man. When these great principles are implanted in the heart, they ensure the performance of every Christian duty, and the development of every Christian virtue.

He who supremely loves God, pants after him, delights in him, trusts in him, and submits to him. He stands in awe of the divine majesty; he is filled with reverence, and sunk into the depths of self-abasement, when he contemplates the immaculate holiness and boundless sovereignty of Jehovah. He lives in the spirit of devotion. The service of God is his delightful employment, and the glory of God his perpetual aim. The obedience which he performs is unreserved and universal; it is rendered with the whole heart, and it has respect unto all the divine commandments. It is evinced by self-government and self-denial; the appetites are in subjection; the flesh is crucified with the affections and lusts. It includes deadness to the world, a holy superiority to its cares and pleasures, and a capability of attending to its concerns with a mind so habitually stayed upon God as to be kept in perfect peace. Thus the sanctified believer lives to God, he walks with God, his soul centres in God. From God his happiness is continually drawn, and to his authority he continually refers. He therefore orders his conversation aright. Prayer and praise, faith and



love, constitute the elements of his spiritual existence. Sustained by divine power, and guided by divine wisdom, he steadfastly pursues the narrow path, and daily increases in meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light.

That entire devotedness to God which is an invariable characteristic of sanctification, will manifest itself by zealous endeavours to promote the best interests of man. He who loves God with all his heart, loves his neighbour as himself. He cherishes feelings of disinterested kindness toward every human being. "As he has opportunity he does good unto all men, especially unto them that are of the household of faith." The interests of the church of God lie near to his heart. The prosperity of the church he makes the subject of unceasing prayer, and the object of strenuous and persevering effort. Enjoying, as he does, the blessedness of religion, he longs to be the medium of communicating its blessedness to others. In whatever department of usefulness he may be qualified and called to act, he performs the duties of it cheerfully. Whatever powers or resources he may possess, he regards as talents committed to his trust, and for which he will be required to give an account; he consequently feels bound to employ them for the good of others, and for the glory of God. In his labours of love he is not prompted by momentary impulses; he is governed by principle; he acts from convictions of duty; and while free from the guilt of lukewarmness, his zeal

has a steadiness and consistency of character which give additional value and efficiency to all its exertions.

It might here be considered unnecessary to state that he whose heart expands with benevolence, will regulate his conduct by the dictates of justice. "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour;" it eradicates selfishness, and substitutes for it a well-regulated and disinterested self-love. It does not annihilate that desire after happiness which forms a part of our nature, but so directs its operations as to render the gratification of it consistent with a proper regard to the rightful claims of our fellow-men. It engraves deeply on the heart that golden rule of equity, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." The sanctified Christian takes this precept for his guide. He embodies it in all his proceedings. He conforms to it even when his present interests, or his future advantage, might seem to require a different course of conduct. Actuated by this ennobling principle, no prospect of emolument will induce him to commit an act of injustice, no assurance of impunity will render him dishonest. He will abhor duplicity and meanness. In all his words and in all his actions there will be a manifest kindness and sincerity which will win confidence; a high and holy sense of honour which will command respect. Piety, justice, and benevolence form the basis of his character: in the development of these great princi-

ples he will adorn the gospel, and recommend its claims.

While sanctification includes a strict adherence to the rules of uprightness, it condemns that unamiable sternness with which unbending integrity is too often associated. It abases pride, and rectifies the temper. In order to be holy it is as necessary to be humble and meek, as it is to be truthful and honest. He who is sanctified is gentle, patient, and forgiving. He is free from discontent, not only when circumstances are favourable to his interests, and according to his wishes; but under trials and disappointments he suppresses every murmuring thought, and yields a childlike submission to the will of God. He puts away anger, bitterness, wrath, and malice; not only when all with whom he is connected act toward him in the spirit of equity and of kindness, but when injury is inflicted upon him, when insult is offered, when his benefits are repaid with ingratitude, when his motives are misconstrued, and his reputation slandered: it is under such circumstances as these that the sanctified Christian exhibits the perfection of holiness, by the exercise of forbearance, and by evincing a readiness to forgive. He loves his enemies; he does not allow himself to exaggerate their misconduct; he cherishes toward them no resentment; he retaliates not for the injuries he has received; he overcomes evil with good; he prays for them that curse him, and blesses them that spitefully use him.

In a word, sanctification consists in the manifestation of that love which "suffereth long and is kind, which envieth not, vaunteth not itself, and which is not puffed up; which doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, and thinketh no evil; which rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; which beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, and endureth all things."\* Sanctification consists in bringing forth "the fruits of the Spirit, which are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." It is "adding to our faith, fortitude; and to fortitude, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly-kindness; and to brotherly-kindness, love."† It is the possession of that "wisdom which is from above; which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

If then you wish thoroughly to understand the nature, and fully to realize the blessing, of sanctification, study the passages you have just read. Contemplate the virtues and duties which

\* The author would strongly recommend to the perusal of his readers that admirable work, "Christian Charity explained," by the Rev. J. A. James.

† This passage is beautifully illustrated in "Christian Characteristics," by the Rev. T. Lewis: a publication of the Tract Society.

they enumerate ; and remember that sanctification is the unceasing cultivation of these virtues, and the faithful performance of these duties.

A calm consideration of the preceding quotations will convince you that spiritual pride and self-sufficiency form no part of Christian holiness ; but that humility is one of its essential ingredients, and that this heavenly virtue maintains the most dominant influence in the heart of him who is perfected in love. In the deportment of the sanctified Christian there is no assumption of superiority ; nothing which seems to say to his fellow Christian, " Stand off, for I am holier than thou ;" on the contrary, " in lowliness of mind he esteems others better than himself," and feels willing to sit at the feet of the meanest of Christ's followers, that he may be stimulated by their example, and edified by their admonitions.

The preceding statements and quotations warrant the conclusion that sanctification is not merely a happy state of feeling, but that it is also a course of holy conduct. It is neither the one nor the other exclusively, but a union of both. I am particularly anxious to press this point upon your attention, because there is, I think, reason to fear that some persons have but partial and contracted views on the subject. They seem to imagine that sanctification consists simply in the enjoyment of gospel privileges : at least they do not sufficiently keep in mind that it essentially includes the performance of gospel duties. By

some it is supposed to be identified with a high degree of excitement, the lessening of which is regarded as the entire loss of a blessing which they thought they had permanently secured. Whereas the change may be nothing more than the operation of physical causes producing their necessary results, while the heart may still retain a fixed hatred to sin, and be fixed in its purpose of entire devotedness to God. Let it not be supposed that the believer is ever to content himself with the absence of that peace and joy which are the fruits of the Spirit, and which, therefore, may and ought to be continually possessed. What I mean is, that in order to be sanctified, it is not needful to be always in ecstasies. Perpetual ecstasy is in the present state impossible; nor, if possible, would it be desirable; its constant prevalence would unfit us for the ordinary duties of life, and would, probably, by exhausting the powers of nature, prematurely terminate our period of probation.

When the Christian, deeply engaged in the exercises of prayer, faith, and love, receives such manifestations of the divine glory as almost overpower his soul, he would fain continue in such a frame as this, he would retain for ever this superabundance of joy. He finds, however, that, like Peter, he must descend from the mount; not to be deprived of the presence and friendship of his divine Master, but to share in his sorrows and temptations, and to follow him in his course of active benevolence

and zeal. The Christian regards these special visitations from heaven, as designed to invigorate him for future conflict, and to fit him for future duty ; as intended to prepare him for suffering and self-denial, and to qualify him for more arduous and efficient labours in the cause of his Redeemer.

That excitement which is genuine has a purifying and humbling, as well as elevating, influence. Its effects are not transient, but permanent. It is not the effervescence of passion ; it is the operation of principle. It is the power of truth acting upon the sensibilities and affections of the heart. It is the result of divine agency. The feelings it produces are consequently as solemn as they are delightful, and as holy as they are powerful.

In the pursuit of holiness aim at nothing less than a full conformity to the gospel standard. This standard requires you to surrender your *whole* heart to God, and to consecrate *all* your powers to his service. This is Christian perfection. Angelic perfection you cannot acquire. Adamic perfection you cannot recover. But Christian perfection is attainable by all ; unless, indeed, God has enjoined precepts which he never intended his people to obey, and given promises which he never intended to perform. Those who oppose this great truth confine their attention too much to the total depravity, and consequent moral impotence of man ; and lose sight of the omnipotence of God, the all-sufficiency of his grace, the unbounded efficacy of

the Saviour's atonement, and the equal prevalence of his intercession. With God all things are possible. There is no enmity, however bitter, which he cannot subdue ; no heart, however hard, which he cannot soften : no pride, however lofty, which he cannot abase ; no pollution, however foul, which he cannot cleanse.

But to the law and to the testimony : what saith the Scripture ? What are the divine requirements and promises on this all-important subject ? For by these must our convictions, our hopes, and our efforts be governed. Give your prayerful consideration to the following passages of God's word ; and the result will, I doubt not, be a stronger persuasion than you have hitherto cherished of the reality and attainableness of Christian perfection :—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength ; and thy neighbour as thyself." "The Lord thy God shall circumcise thine heart, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul." "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean ; from *all* your filthiness will I cleanse you." "Sin shall not have dominion over you." "Being made free from sin, ye have your fruit unto holiness." "Be ye *filled* with the Spirit." "Let us go on unto perfection." "Having these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from *all* filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." "Praying fervently that ye may stand



*perfect* and *complete* in *all* the will of God." "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." "He is faithful and just to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." To save the trouble of multiplying quotations, I refer you to Luke i, 6; Acts xi, 24; Phil. ii, 15; 2 Peter iii, 14; Ephes. v, 26, 27; Col. i, 22; 1 Thess. iii, 13; Titus ii, 12-14; 2 Thess. iii, 3; Heb. xiii, 21.

If the exhortations, prayers, and promises which I have just quoted and referred to, do not prove the possibility of our being perfected in holiness, they prove nothing. Let all these passages be examined, in connection with the verses which immediately precede and follow them, so that their general scope and original application may be ascertained; let them be diligently compared with other passages of the same import, and with the tenor of the Scriptures; and it will, I think, be found, by every prayerful and candid inquirer, that to love God with all the heart, and to serve him constantly with a willing mind, are obligations which it is practicable for every Christian to fulfil, and privileges which it is possible for every Christian to enjoy.

By Christian perfection, we do not mean a perfection that is incapable of improvement. Its invariable and leading characteristic is a daily advancement in practical piety.

Sanctification, in the highest degree of it, is essentially a progressive work. Its operations, in this respect, are in perfect accordance with the constitution of the human mind. It is by a gradual process that knowledge is acquired, and the intellectual faculties invigorated. The faith and love of the Christian gradually increase; "he grows in grace;" "he goes on from strength to strength;" he "abounds more and more" in the fruits of righteousness. The principles of holiness gain maturity and predominance by continued cultivation; and religious duties acquire the power and fixedness of habits by oft-repeated and persevering exercise. As the understanding is more fully enlightened, its discernment of the things of God is rendered more distinct and comprehensive. As the heart receives increasingly powerful impressions of divine truth, it becomes the more firmly "established with grace." Thus is the character formed and perfected; thus is it made to exhibit, in delightful proportion, the features of Christian excellence, and to shine forth in all the beauties of holiness.

The progressiveness of sanctification is in no way inconsistent with those powerful operations of the Spirit with which the believer is at times favoured, by which his remaining corruptions receive an instantaneous death-blow, and his soul is filled with the purity and joy of perfect love. While it is maintained that intellectual improvement is mainly and necessarily progressive, it must also

be admitted that the human mind is capable of receiving impressions which produce an instantaneous change in its convictions, reversing some of its strongest feelings, and removing the most deeply rooted prejudices. By an unexpected turn of thought, a question which has long been the subject of toilsome and perplexing investigation may be suddenly divested of all its difficulties, and be exhibited in its true nature and bearings, so that the future contemplation of it shall be attended with the light and certainty of truth. If then there be nothing either irrational or unphilosophical in the supposition that the human mind may undergo a sudden revolution of opinion or of feeling in reference to sublunary matters, where is the absurdity of believing it possible for God to communicate instantaneously such a measure of divine influence as shall at once destroy the body of sin, and fill the heart with love and devotedness to himself? If, in one hour, the partially sanctified Christian is lamenting the lukewarmness of his affection, the petulance of his temper, and the unfaithfulness of his services, why should it be deemed a thing incredible or impossible, that in the next hour God should put an end to these complainings by cleansing the soul from *all* unrighteousness, by strengthening it with *all* *might*, and by giving the principles and purposes of obedience an absolute dominion?

While thus maintaining the possibility of an instantaneous purification of the heart, I am by

no means prepared to contend that this is the precise and only mode, or the one which God invariably and universally adopts in accomplishing the designs of his mercy. Undoubtedly there must be a point of time in the history of every believer when sin ceases to exist in the heart, and when holiness commences its reign ; but in some, sin may have been weakened by a process so gradual that the moment of its final extinction may not be perceptible. Neither may the interesting crisis be always attended with those powerful manifestations with which some are so happily favoured. That God who knows our frame, our wants, and our circumstances, may so diversify the operations of his grace, as to adapt them to our peculiarities of temperament and character. Provided we obtain the blessing, the mode of its bestowment is of little importance.

Be determined, therefore, to labour after a perfect conformity to the image of Christ ; fix your heart on the attainment of this exalted privilege ; let your efforts be strenuous and unremitting ; never rest until you have a distinct consciousness that you love God with a supreme and all-absorbing affection. If you aim at less than this, your spiritual energies will languish : instead of zeal there will be lukewarmness ; instead of devotion, formality ; instead of advancement in piety, there will be manifest declension. If you intend to be faithful to yourself, and to your God, you will aim at perfection ; if you wish to honour him who

loved you, and gave himself for you, you will aim at perfection ; if you desire to be happy in your own soul, and to be a blessing to the church and to the world, you will aim at perfection ; if you have “respect unto the recompense of reward,”—in short, if, as a Christian, you are *sincere*,—you will aim at perfection.

You scarcely need to be informed that, in the pursuit of this great blessing, diligence in the means of grace is imperatively requisite. But you must never lose sight of the all-important fact, that faith is the direct instrument of your sanctification. The Christian “lives by faith ;” he “walks by faith ;” his heart is “purified by faith ;” he is “sanctified by faith that is in Christ Jesus.” If this truth had not been thus explicitly stated, it must have been inferred from those declarations which inform us that sanctification is the work of a divine agent ; that it is also the subject of promise ; and that it is accomplished in us through the mediation of the Son of God.

That you may properly exercise the faith which sanctifies, your attention must first be directed to the power of the Holy Ghost ; whose prerogative it is to cleanse the heart from sin, and to make it his constant habitation. You must have the assurance that the Spirit of God is fully competent to the work he has undertaken ; that, as his resources are inexhaustible, he is able to supply the most pressing wants, to satisfy the most enlarged desires ; that, as his energy is infinite, he is able to con-

quer the most formidable enemies, and to eradicate the foulest and most deeply rooted corruption. Cherish, therefore, an undoubting conviction of the all-sufficiency of divine influence ; upon this influence place your entire dependance ; submit yourself at once to its control ; and with wrestling and unceasing prayer, beseech God to give you his Holy Spirit in all the power and plenitude of his sanctifying operations.

Your faith must also rest on the promises of sanctification. You must meditate upon them, mention them, and plead them at the throne of grace. With bold but humble importunity, you must not only implore the fulfilment of them, but with confidence expect that fulfilment. Contemplating the fulness, the freeness, and the certainty of these promises, they must be the objects of a firm reliance, and the foundation of a steadfast hope ; they must, in fact, be regarded as the engagements of Him who cannot lie. Do not question either the faithfulness or the mercy of God. Hold fast to the persuasion that he is not only willing to sanctify you, but that it is his will you should be sanctified. Your sanctification is not only an event to which he feels no repugnance ; it is an event on which his holy and benevolent mind is intently fixed ; it is an event which he has pledged himself to accomplish for all who yield themselves up to his government and service. Solemnly dedicate all your powers to God. Surrender your whole heart to him ; offer it him

with all its wanderings, with all its pride, and with all its remaining corruption. He will prove himself faithful; he will be true to his word; only believe; all things are possible to him that believeth.

Gospel promises are fulfilled, and gospel blessings are communicated, only through Christ. To Christ crucified, to Christ glorified, must you therefore look as the only medium of sanctification. It is out of his fulness that grace is imparted; it is in consequence of his intercession that believers are "endued with power from on high." His death purchased your restoration not only to the favour, but also to the image of God. The object of his advocacy is to invest his people with those benefits which his death procured. If, then, you wish to be fully sanctified, you must repose your confidence in the great Mediator; regarding him as the Head of the church, into whose hands the dispensation of the Spirit is committed; and believing that his blood purgeth the conscience, not only from the guilt, but also from the defilement, of dead works; and that, by the agency of the Spirit, he will, in his own right, reign without a rival in the hearts of his people. "He gave himself for them, that he might redeem them from all iniquity, and that he might purify them unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." They are "sanctified in his name;" and his power resting upon them enables them to glory in their infirmities, and to consecrate themselves fully to his service.

How glorious are the objects, how ample the grounds, of that faith by which the heart is purified! Here is an Agent who is omnipotent; here are promises which are immutable; here is a Mediator who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. An abundant provision of spiritual blessings is here offered to our acceptance, and placed within our reach. Perfect holiness is purchased, is promised, is ready to take possession of our hearts, that it may diffuse its hallowing influence over us, and develop its legitimate fruits in our conduct. It can neither be in accordance with the divine will, nor can it be promotive of the divine glory, that sin should remain in us to darken our perceptions and to interrupt our joy. If indeed we are required to love God with all our hearts, to rejoice in the Lord always, and yet fail to conform to this elevated standard of piety, the failure cannot be well-pleasing to Him who has said, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." Sin, in all its modifications, is unchangeably opposed to the will of God; he looks upon its feeblest operations with abhorrence: it must, therefore, be his will concerning us, that we should be free from sin, and that not in a year or in a month hence, but to-day; if, in the present hour, or in the present moment, the power of sin could be overthrown, and the heart filled with purity and love, there would surely be nothing in such an event, either dishonourable to God, or injurious to ourselves. And is it not possible? Who shall



limit the Holy One of Israel? Is not the fountain always open; open for sin and for uncleanness? It is open, it is continually free of access; and if we do not experience the full extent of its efficacy, it is because of our unbelief. It is unbelief that gives strength to corruption, that gives distraction to our prayers, and coldness to our affections. Endeavour then to believe. Contemplate the power of the Spirit: dwell on the certainty of the promises: appropriate Christ to yourself as your Advocate with the Father; and believe that he is not only able, but willing and ready, to glorify himself by effecting your entire sanctification.

For more extensive information, and more specific directions, on this interesting topic, I refer you to Mr. Wesley's "Plain Account of Christian Perfection." If you have leisure and inclination to enter into the arguments by which the doctrine is opposed and defended, you will find the principal of them in Mr. Fletcher's "Last Check to Antinomianism." The Rev. Mr. Treffry has also published a work on this subject, which, I doubt not, is worthy of the well-known character and talents of the author. You will find yourself greatly quickened in the pursuit of sanctification by perusing the memoris of eminent Christians; such as Mr. Wesley, Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher, Lady Maxwell, Mrs. H. A. Rogers, D. Stoner, J. Smith, Williams of Kidderminster, &c.

## CHAPTER IV.

## ON THE MEANS OF PROMOTING PERSONAL RELIGION,—WATCHFULNESS AND SELF-EXAMINATION.

FOR all the consolation you enjoy, and for all the moral energy you possess as a Christian, you are indebted to the agency of the Holy Spirit. It is he who worketh in you to will and to do of his good pleasure. The necessity of this agency you cannot too deeply feel: your dependance upon it can neither be too constant nor too exclusive. While, however, you are indebted to divine influence for peace of mind and holiness of character, you must never forget that the bestowment of this influence is governed by laws which God himself has appointed, and to which he requires a faithful obedience. In the exercise of infinite wisdom and benevolence, he has determined to communicate his grace to those who use the means of obtaining it; and these means are the ordinances which he himself has instituted, and in the observance of which we become the recipients of those blessings that accompany salvation.

The fact that these means are of divine appointment, is of itself sufficient to render the observance of them matter of imperative obligation. We are not, however, required to adopt them merely because God has enjoined them; for

they are as much the indications of his goodness, as they are of his authority. They recommend themselves to us because they are simple, suitable, and practicable. They are involved in no impenetrable mysteries; they require no self-inflicted tortures; they demand no impossible achievements. They disown the pomp and tediousness of ceremony; they need not the flimsy decorations with which superstition has invested them. So adapted are they to our circumstances, that they might almost seem to have been the natural result of them; they find us in poverty, and they bring into our possession durable riches and righteousness; they find us in helplessness, and they lead us to omnipotence for strength; they find us in darkness, and through their medium divine light shines into our hearts, and guides our feet into the way of peace. By the observance of these means we not only gain access to God, but perpetuate our communion with him; by them we give expression to our wants, and obtain the fulfilment of his promises; they are the channels by which he supplies us with spiritual nourishment, and by which he communicates those gifts which we are commanded earnestly to covet and diligently to seek.

Valuable as the means of grace are, it must be remembered that they are valuable only as means. They are not the efficient, they are only the instrumental, causes of our spiritual improvement. Of themselves they possess no efficacy. Their adaptation to our circumstances

gives them no transforming or purifying power. Unaccompanied by divine influence they are lifeless, unprofitable, and even burdensome. It is true that the observance of them, when prompted by evangelical motives, forms a part of that homage which we owe to God : by such an observance we acknowledge his supremacy, and our state of dependance and obligation. But this must not be allowed to supersede the ordinary duties of life : the means of grace are designed not as a substitute for these duties, but to qualify us for the more active performance of them. Religion does not consist in merely going through a course of devotional exercises, but in rendering these exercises subservient to our advancement in holiness. The satisfaction we find in them should not result simply from the fact of our having engaged in them, but from the consciousness that they are instrumental in bringing us nearer to God, in discovering to us more clearly our own insufficiency, and in causing us to rely more entirely upon Christ for every spiritual blessing. While in obedience to the divine command, we wait upon God in his ordinances, we must not repose our confidence in them. Our confidence must be in Christ ; our comfort must be derived from him. But such is the deceitfulness of the heart, and such are the devices of Satan, that there is danger lest religious duties should usurp that place in our minds which ought to be exclusively occupied by the Son of God as our **only** and all-sufficient Saviour.

The means of grace consist, in part, of those exercises which are most properly attended to in the seclusion of the closet ; and, in part, of those which can only be observed when Christians are congregated together. The duty to which I shall first direct your attention is, however, not confined either to time or to place, but is always necessary and always practicable. Such are the characteristics of Christian WATCHFULNESS. This duty consists of a habit of circumspection and self-observance : it includes an unremitting attention to the operations of our own minds with a special reference to our spiritual interests. It is the legitimate result of impressions which divine truth makes upon the heart : when those impressions are powerful and permanent, they originate desires and motives which necessarily stimulate to the exercise of watchfulness.

The obligations to watchfulness are grounded on the infinite value of the soul ; on our accountability to God ; and on the dangers to which we are exposed from natural corruption, from the influence of the world, and from the temptations of the wicked one. If we possessed an earthly treasure, the preservation of which we deemed essential to our happiness, but which was liable to deteriorate by neglect, or to be taken from us by perfidy or by violence, how anxious should we feel for its safety ! how assiduous in its protection ! and as dangers multiplied, how ingenious and energetic should we be in devising the means of security ! The Christian who properly estimates his heavenly treasure, and

who is aware of the evils to which it is exposed, will be continually on the alert ; anxiously will he guard his soul against the dangers with which it may be threatened ; incessantly will he labour not only to keep possession of the peace and purity which he has obtained, but to render them more perfect and more abundant. Not only will he strenuously resist his spiritual enemies when he feels the fierceness of their opposition, but he will be so observant of events, and so deliberate in his movements, that he will prevent numerous temptations from overtaking him, and thereby frequently save himself from the struggles and disadvantages of the conflict.

The objects of watchfulness comprise whatever is calculated to affect our experience and character as the followers of Christ. In this exercise our attention should be directed to our words and to our actions. When we endeavour so to order our conduct as to maintain uniform consistency ; when we are habitually mindful of the probable tendency of what we say and of what we do ; when we speak and act as in the presence and in the fear of God, then we are watchful. When we are strictly observant of the motives by which we are actuated ; when we accustom ourselves impartially to weigh the reasons of our conduct ; when we refuse to be governed by mere impulse and selfishness ; when we reject those considerations which God has condemned ; and when we adopt only such as he will approve, then we

are watchful. When we are acutely sensitive to the first risings of *angry and resentful tempers*; when our consciences are tenderly alive to the necessity of suppressing such feelings; when we act in accordance with our convictions, and labour to cultivate meekness, forbearance, gentleness, and love, then we are watchful. When from the consciousness we have that our thoughts are apt to revel in scenes of ideal happiness, and to dwell on frivolous and forbidden objects, we feel the necessity of restraining them; and when, under the influence of this impression, we promptly expel all vain and foolish thoughts, and encourage and retain only those which are either proper and useful, or edifying and holy, then we are watchful. When we endeavour to ascertain the weaknesses peculiar to our own character; when we strive to correct them, and to prevent their development, then we are watchful. When we observe the effect which different circumstances have upon us; when we discover and also remember that, in particular situations, and in the company of particular individuals, we are exposed to temptation, and that our spiritual interests sustain injury; and when we carefully avoid such associations, or, if unavoidable, we fortify our minds against their dangerous influence, then we are watchful. When from the experience we have of the fiery darts of the wicked one, from a perception of the arduousness of our duties, and from a sense of our utter helplessness, we habitually look to Jesus,

for the grace that is all-sufficient, then are we truly watchful.

Need I adduce any further considerations, with the view of urging you to the performance of this essential duty? Remember, it is enforced by the most solemn sanctions. Christ himself has commanded it; your own circumstances require it; and every thing that is awful in your responsibility as a Christian demands your time, and your energies, for this great work. Contemplate for a moment the advantages that will result from a habit of watchfulness. Your mind will be kept free from corroding anxiety, and from tumultuous passion. Your conscience will not be burdened by self-condemnation, nor will your heart be polluted by the prevalence of evil thoughts and tempers. You will have a quick discernment of sin, and as keen a perception of its deformity. Promptly will you repel its encroachments, and successfully will you resist its assaults. The temptations which sin and Satan may lay before you will be lessened in number, and weakened in power. The sedateness and self-possession, which are essential to watchfulness, will prepare you for those conflicts which are unavoidable; while the sensibility and foresight which watchfulness imparts will enable you to escape many a snare in which you would otherwise be involved. If you are constantly watchful, you will constantly preserve a devotional spirit: this will give you an increasing relish for closet duties, and will render those duties always



delightful, and always profitable. You will by watchfulness be made alive to your manifold obligations, and be led to the performance of every duty in its proper season. You will go on in a course of improvement, and exhibit a stability of character, by which you will benefit the church, and glorify God. Affliction shall not overwhelm you; death shall not alarm you. You will acquire that confidence and peace which will not abandon you, when the chastisements of your heavenly Father are upon you, and in the possession of which you will be undismayed by the last summons, however suddenly it may arrive.

Consider, on the other hand, the certain consequences of unwatchfulness. You may keep up a profession of religion; but whether it will be any thing more than a profession, your own experience will most truly testify. Most assuredly you will never attain to spiritual-mindedness, nor will you realize the enjoyment of spiritual privileges. You will be a cold-hearted, worldly-minded, barren professor. You will dishonour the gospel by the levity of your deportment, the rashness of your expressions, and the petulance of your temper. Your conscience will lose its tenderness, and your heart its purity. Your temptations will be multiplied, and their strength redoubled. Satan will find in you an easy victim: he will either betray you into open apostacy, or by transforming himself into an angel of light, beguile you by some fatal delusion, and con-

duct you to your ruin. In short, unless you are watchful, you cannot be saved. If watchfulness be, as it certainly is, necessary to retain the blessings of salvation, it follows that he who is unwatchful must lose those blessings. It is needless to add, that the ultimate consequence of losing the blessings of salvation, must be an exclusion from heaven, a consignment to hell.

O then, whatever sacrifices it may cost, be watchful. Your comfort, your consistency, your advancement in piety, your salvation, depend on the proper performance of this duty. But in order to the faithful discharge of it, what self-denial, what determination, what strength of principle, what constancy of effort are requisite! And who is sufficient for these things? To struggle against nature, to overcome the world's influence, and effectually to resist temptation, how unremitting, how arduous the conflict! but how necessary the conquest! Let not the consciousness of your weakness discourage you, neither let the magnitude of your difficulties appal you. Your sufficiency is of God. There is an Agent who can and who will produce those impressions, implant those motives, and impart that strength which will prompt you to unceasing watchfulness. Implore his aid: depend on his power. Invigorated by his influence, difficulties will vanish, and needless anxieties will depart. Let your thoughts dwell frequently and deeply on the worth of your soul, the sufferings of

Christ, your responsibility to God, and the realities of eternity. A heartfelt conviction of these solemn truths will stimulate and direct you; they will excite a godly jealousy over yourself, and a filial fear of offending your heavenly Father; their influence will constrain you to keep your heart with all diligence; and thus watching unto prayer, yours will be the delightful privilege of walking humbly and closely with your God.

Nearly allied to watchfulness is the no less important duty of SELF-EXAMINATION. The former may be regarded as a habit which should be constantly maintained; the latter as a distinct and deliberate act of the mind, to the performance of which a special and suitable season must be appropriated. In self-examination we recall the feelings, thoughts, and conduct that have occupied a period which has past; we subject them to a judicial investigation, with the view of ascertaining the degree of their conformity to a certain standard. Self-examination not only takes cognizance of the past; it also inquires into our present religious impressions, scrutinizes the principles by which we are *now* actuated, and endeavours to determine what are our *present* spiritual attainments, and what is the course which we are *now* pursuing. In this exercise the Christian takes an impartial survey of his own character, and enters into judgment on himself.

In self-examination, we must refer to the word of God as the only standard by which

our inquiries are to be directed, and our decisions formed. The precepts of Scripture prescribe to us the full extent of Christian duty, and its promises unfold to us the heights and depths of Christian privileges. We must, therefore, search our hearts and our characters by the light of truth; and endeavour to ascertain whether we are practising the duties which it requires, and enjoying the privileges it confers. The examples of eminently pious men may stimulate us; their instructions may materially assist us; but we must follow them only so far as they have followed Christ. If we compare ourselves with them, it must be with their superior excellences, not with their defects: if we adopt their rules and maxims to assist us in the business of self-examination, it must be on account of their manifest conformity to the rules and maxims of God's word. This word is infallible, it therefore may safely be trusted; its authority is divine, it therefore has a rightful claim to our highest regard. If when looking into ourselves we refer to living specimens of Christian character, such inferiority of spiritual attainments, such feebleness of religious principle, may force themselves upon our attention, as will generate pride instead of humility, and thus defeat the principal end of self-inspection. But if we refer to the standard of eternal truth, and test ourselves by its statements, we shall not only be directed by an unerring guide, but we shall always discover heights of perfection, toward which we may continually aspire,

and depths of infinite love which have yet to be sounded, and into which our souls have yet to sink. Moreover, in adopting the Scriptures as our standard in the duty of self-examination, we are furnished with one example, which exhibits moral excellence unmingled with human infirmity, and unalloyed with human corruption; an example of active obedience, of patient suffering, of meek endurance; an example consisting of the developments of a mind filled with unbounded benevolence, unsullied purity, the most exalted heavenly affections, and entire devotedness to God. This example we are required to imitate: the same mind must be in us which was in Christ Jesus; if we wish to fulfil the divine purpose concerning us, we must be conformed to the moral image of the Son of God. In self-examination, therefore, we must bring into view the prominent features of the Redeemer's character, and compare ourselves with them: and if we discover that the likeness we bear to Christ is so faint as to be scarcely perceptible; yea, if we discover points of contrast in his character and ours; we must not yield to discouragement, but rouse ourselves to exertion; we must not turn away in despair from the faultless prototype, but contemplate the Saviour's excellences with the eye of faith, so that "beholding as by a mirror the glory of the Lord, we may be transformed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord."

The process of self-examination should be

conducted with the strictest fidelity. It is difficult, generally speaking, for the mind distinctly to recall, and closely to survey, its own operations. It is easier for us to mark the peculiarities of others, than to scrutinize our own. The pride and deceitfulness of the heart cause us to shrink from the discovery of our imperfections, and would induce us to impose upon ourselves in matters that involve our everlasting destiny. Thus the duty of self-examination is frequently performed in a careless and superficial manner. A few general inquiries are proposed, to which indefinite answers are given; or, if the truth should force itself upon the conscience, its admonitions lose their effect, by the adoption of some presumptuous hope, or by fleeing to some false ground of consolation. If, then, you would avoid the guilt of hypocrisy, on the one hand, or the consequences of a criminal self-deception, on the other, be faithful to yourself and to God in the exercise of self-examination. Let your inquiries be close, searching, and severe. Spare not your own feelings, neither show mercy even to the infirmities of your nature. Be determined that no secret sin shall escape your notice. Penetrate into the inmost recesses of your heart, trace its windings and its wanderings, ascertain its most hidden springs of action; be resolved to exterminate from it the least remnant of corruption; and test all its movements, its thoughts, its tempers, and its affections, by that rule which both requires and promises

the entire sanctification of them that believe.

This duty should be attended to with frequency and regularity. Are there not many religious professors who are verily guilty in this matter? Is not a total neglect of self-examination chargeable upon multitudes who name the name of Christ? And is it not to this neglect that we are, partly at least, to attribute the worldiness and lukewarmness with which the church of God is so deeply infected? While, in the order of means, nothing so powerfully quickens and invigorates as a daily inspection of our spiritual state, nothing so surely causes declension and darkness as the entire or partial omission of this duty. An occasional performance of it, with long intervals of neglect, will not suffice. There must be perseverance. The difficulties of the exercise are increased by this neglect: it requires a fixedness of thought which is to be obtained only by habit. Moreover, when it is but slightly or but seldom attended to, spiritual influence will be so feeble, as to be hardly discoverable. There will be so much of evil in the character, as to cause distressing perplexity and even bitter remorse. Thus, not only by neglect, but by the consequences of neglect, are the difficulties and the painfulness of self-examination augmented. Whereas a frequent and regular performance of it, will not only render it less arduous, but will be one means of overcoming the natural repugnance of the mind to the exercise. That ad-

vancement in faith and love and joy, which will be the happy results of frequency and regularity, will also cause a still further decrease of the difficulties you may at first experience. As the blessings and principles of the gospel more fully occupy the heart, they will be more easily discernible; they will become more boldly prominent to the eye of inspection; a satisfactory conclusion will be more speedily and yet safely formed; and thus gratitude and joy will take the place of embarrassment and shame.

In order, therefore, to give a timely check to the insidious encroachments of sin, and to maintain intimate communion with God, you must make it a point of conscience *daily* to examine yourself. As the prudent and upright tradesman will subject his affairs to a periodical investigation, in order that he may ascertain the amount of his gains and losses, and adopt means of preserving and increasing the former, and of retrieving the latter; so the Christian will, at regular and appointed seasons, search into his heart, review his conduct, and thereby ascertain whether he be retrograding or advancing in religion. And he who understands the nature, and is properly alive to the importance, of self-examination, will find that to perform it efficiently, he must devote his attention to it *daily*; that to observe it less frequently, is productive of serious disadvantage; that as it lengthens the retrospect, it taxes the memory beyond what it has power to accomplish, and that consequently many heart-wanderings will be forgotten, and



many evils remain undetected and unlamented. Be solemnly determined, therefore, to set apart a portion of every day for the purpose of holding close and faithful converse with yourself.

While your own judgment must guide you in the selection, it may be suggested whether the evening does not generally present the most favourable opportunity for engaging in this solemn exercise. When the occupations and cares of the day are over, the mind can more easily collect its ideas, and exercise itself in calm but deep reflection. To recall the incidents of the day, to bring to remembrance the thoughts and feelings with which they have been associated, and impartially to review the motives of our conduct, is, as a part of our evening's employment, not only to be recommended as advantageous, but may also be urged as indispensable. If it immediately precede the exercise of prayer, it will furnish matter for enlarged and special supplication, as well as for the expression of ardent thankfulness to God for the temporal and spiritual mercies which he has conferred.

Those points in your character, respecting which you should examine yourself, depend in some measure on the circumstances in which you are placed : there are nevertheless certain matters which ought *always* to be made the subjects of rigid investigation. Without wishing to dictate, you will probably find that some such questions as the following, solemnly proposed, and honestly answered, will afford you some direction and assistance in the performance

of this essential duty:—1. In what frame of mind did I this morning enter upon the duties and occupations of the day? Was I fervent, humble, and believing, in private devotion, and did I go forth into the world feeling my helplessness, and looking up to God for guidance and strength? 2. What have been my prevailing thoughts, desires, and affections, during the day? Have they been fixed on foolish, forbidden, and sinful objects; or have they been, as much as possible, directed to those things which make for my everlasting peace? 3. What has, this day, been the prevailing temper of my mind? Have I been in any circumstances more than usually trying? Have I maintained meekness, forbearance, and a readiness to forgive? Or have I yielded to petulance, resentment, envy, or unkindness? Have I given unnecessary pain or offence to any human being? 4. Have I been strictly upright and honourable in all my dealings? Have I been faithful in the discharge of those duties which devolve upon me in the station which I occupy? 5. Have I ordered my words aright before God? Have I spoken falsely, or in any way calculated to convey an impression contrary to the truth? Have I been guilty of evil-speaking? Has my conversation been trifling and unprofitable; or has it been serious, edifying, and consistent? 6. Have I this day done all in my power to promote the cause of God? Have I reproved sin? Have I, when opportunity has served, faithfully, but tenderly, admonished

the unconverted? Have I been called upon this day to assist the cause of God, at home or abroad, either by pecuniary contribution, or by personal exertion? Have I done what I could?

7. Have I throughout this day maintained communion with God? Have I kept up a sense of his presence, and in all things had a single eye to his glory? Have I occasionally lifted up my heart to him in ejaculatory prayer?

8. Have I this day lived by faith in the Son of God? Have I this day realized the cleansing and peace-giving efficacy of the Saviour's blood? Have I regarded him as my Advocate with the Father; and have I with confidence expected, through his intercession, the blessings which he has purchased and promised?

9. What is my present state and character in a religious point of view? Am I alive to God? Do I love him supremely? Do I enjoy an assurance of his favour? Am I growing in grace? Have I fervent charity toward all men? Have I a heart to sympathize with the afflicted, to relieve the wretched, and to love my enemies?

There are, I think, but few of the preceding questions which ought not to be pressed upon the conscience at the close of every day. Many of the inquiries will be speedily and satisfactorily answered by those who are spiritually-minded and truly devoted to God. While every answer should be given deliberately, with the deepest conviction of its integrity, the process of self-examination will be

longer or shorter, as the mind feels reluctant and perplexed, or ready and decided, in the performance of the duty.

Events will frequently occur in the private history of the Christian, and also in his family, in the church, and in the world, which, as they may more or less bear on his religious profession, require that he should make them the grounds of distinct and special self-examination. When suffering, either from personal or from domestic affliction, or from worldly losses and disappointments, inquiry should be made how the chastisement is received, and what effects it produces; whether those effects are manifested by resignation and confidence, or by fretfulness and despondency. In the prospect of any new undertaking, or in the experience of any change of circumstances, we should thoroughly investigate our motives and obligations. When the interests of the church are peculiarly adverse, or when they are unusually prosperous, it behoves us, at least, to endeavour to ascertain whether we have contributed to the one or to the other; what is our present duty, and what course we are actually pursuing. The world, with its startling movements, strange aspects, and fierce conflicts, will suggest to the observant Christian topics not only of serious thought, but of searching self-inquiry. In times like the present the moral influence of every individual is of importance; and he who wishes to be found faithful will, in reference to passing events, consider whether his religious

profession be such as is calculated to promote the purity and stability of the church, as well as to preserve, what ought to be, its obvious distinction from the world.

The relations which the Christian may sustain should not be altogether overlooked. The head of a family will have inquiries to propose which would be inapplicable to a subordinate member of the household. An officer of the church must examine himself as to the fulfilment of duties which do not devolve upon a private member. The man of wealth has a stewardship to discharge, which, consequently, requires a kind of scrutiny that would not be suitable for him who has to struggle with the privations of poverty. Every Christian, however humble his station, has certain talents committed to his trust; and he whose conscience is divinely enlightened, and whose eye is single to the glory of God, will be careful to inform himself of every obligation that belongs to him, nor will there be wanting those reflections on his own conduct, which will tend to enlarge his sense of duty, and prompt him to greater zeal in the service of his Master.

When self-examination leads to the detection of any sin, either of commission or of omission, the event should not only be made the subject of confession and the cause of humiliation, but should be followed by an *immediate* application to the blood of Christ, so that the guilt which has been contracted may be at once removed. To allow guilt to remain upon the conscience

is to strengthen its influence, to deepen its defilement, and needlessly to retain its condemnation. Earnest supplication should also be offered that grace may be given, that for the future you may be enabled to overcome the temptation, or to avoid the evil into which you have fallen.

When the retrospect of a day's proceedings results in the "testimony of your conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity you have had your conversation in the world," fail not to remember that it is "by the grace of God" that you have maintained a consistent deportment. When happy in the faithful discharge of your duty, and joyfully sensible of your advancement in holiness, let the language of your heart be, "Not unto me, O Lord, not unto me, but unto thy name be *all* the glory, for thy *mercy* and thy *truth's* sake." Let not the possession of "a good conscience" become the source of spiritual pride; neither let it degenerate into self-righteous confidence: with humble gratitude attribute all your attainments in piety to that divine Agent whose prerogative it is to create you anew in Christ Jesus, and to establish, strengthen, and settle you in the duties and privileges of the gospel.

You may, from what has been said, perceive, to some extent, the advantages of self-examination. It gives a timely disclosure of approaching danger, and early discovers those otherwise imperceptible gradations by which evil habits and tempers regain their ascendancy.

It produces a painful conviction of our weakness ; but it compels us to trust in that power which is ever ready to assist us, and which is declared to be in all our extremities “ sufficient for us.” In short, as it lays before us our peculiarities of character, it is the only means of obtaining that invaluable acquisition, self-knowledge ; destitute of which, the most extensive acquaintance with history, science, and literature, will, in the end, be utterly worthless.

By self-examination we obtain more enlarged and Scriptural views of Christian duty : we are brought more fully under the operation of Christian motives ; and are stimulated to seek the constant enjoyment of Christian privileges. It impresses the law of God more deeply on our hearts, and prompts us to a universal obedience. While it reveals to us our spiritual poverty, it discloses to us the unsearchable riches of Christ, and causes us to estimate more highly the infinite preciousness of his blood. It enables us to rectify errors in our conduct, before they have become dominant and incurable ; and by the most heart-stirring considerations, it constrains us to live by faith, and to maintain habitual peace and fellowship with God.

The difficulties with which this duty is encompassed render the assistance of the Holy Spirit absolutely needful. Without his influence, neither the natural sluggishness of the mind, nor the natural repugnance of the heart

to spiritual exercises, can be overcome. He, however, will give energy to your efforts, and fixedness to your thoughts; he will direct your inquiries, awaken your conscience, bring your works to remembrance, shine into your soul, lay open before you the chambers of imagery, and apply, with a quickening and illuminating power, the precepts, warnings, and promises of the word of God. When, therefore, you enter upon this solemn duty, rely on the influence of the Holy Spirit, and fervently supplicate its bestowment. Consider yourself as in the immediate presence of the holy and heart-searching God; anticipate a judgment to come; realize the nearness of eternity, contemplate its fearful alternatives; and with trembling jealousy over yourself, exclaim, with the Psalmist, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."



## CHAPTER V.

### MEANS OF PROMOTING PERSONAL PIETY (CONTINUED)—PRAYER, AND READING THE SCRIPTURES.

AMONG the religious exercises to which the gospel claims our attention, there are none that possess a more interesting character, none that are invested with a higher importance, than the duty of PRAYER. In watchfulness and self-examination we hold more immediate converse with ourselves; in prayer we hold converse with God. It is the divinely appointed means by which we gain access to the eternal throne, there to spread out our wants, and to make known our requests to the monarch of the universe.

The reasons and obligations which bind us to this duty are founded on the nature of man. Man, as it regards even his physical condition, is absolutely dependant on a superior power. For the supply of his daily wants he is indebted to the bountiful Giver of all good; from him he derives his capacities for enjoyment, as well as the bodily and mental vigour by which he is enabled to pursue his usual course of occupation. The uncertain tenure of all temporal blessings proves how utterly powerless is the boasted strength of man, when the omnipotent Deity determines either to impoverish his resources, or to make him the

subject of calamity and sorrow. What then can be more reasonable than that a being thus helpless should acknowledge the supremacy, and implore the protection of his Creator and Benefactor? Prayer, we might imagine, would be the natural, the spontaneous language of his heart.

Man is not only a dependant, but a sinful creature. As a rebel against the divine government, he is exposed to the threatenings of divine justice; of himself he is incapable of meeting the demands of this justice; and it is owing to the forbearance of God that its terrors do not overwhelm him. "It is of the Lord's mercies that he is not consumed." Now, when it is discovered to us that this is actually our condition,—when we feel that sin reigns over us in all its power, pollution, and guilt, prayer is the immediate result of such a conviction: we are impelled to it by the stern dictates of necessity. Conscious that we have offended God, we implore his mercy; sensible of our defilement, we supplicate the renovating influence of his grace; feeling the spiritual darkness with which sin has blinded us, we ask for that divine illumination which alone can lead us in the path of holiness and peace; in short, oppressed with a sense of our spiritual destitution and wretchedness, we apply to Him who has promised to enrich and gladden our souls with the joys of his salvation. The publican, when he saw the magnitude of his guilt, and the depth of his misery, could ex-

claim, without any formal course of instruction, "God be merciful to me a sinner." 'This was the language of prayer. Peter, when terrified with the apprehensions of appalling danger, needed no exhortation to induce him to cry out, "Master, save me, or I perish." This, too, was prayer.

If the duty of prayer be so obviously suitable to the sinner conscious of his guilt, it is not less so to the circumstances and exigencies of the children of God. They have conflicts and difficulties, fears and sorrows, which they can unbosom only to their heavenly Father; to him they have to look for comfort, strength, and guidance; they have wants which he only can supply; desires which, having been implanted by his Spirit, can only be satisfied out of his own infinite fulness. By them, therefore, prayer is not only acknowledged to be a duty of paramount obligation, but is regarded as an invaluable privilege. Living in a world, the spirit of which is hostile to their religious interests and feelings, and exposed, as they are, to the assaults of the prince of darkness, how could they sustain the pressure of temptation—how could they maintain a steadfast adherence to duty, were it not that by pouring out their hearts to God they realize the blessedness of communion with him, and obtain from him the grace which strengthens, and the wisdom which directs them? When distressed with a sense of unfaithfulness, when mourning over their heart-wanderings, they would sink under their load

of grief and anxiety, were they not assured that a throne of grace is always accessible ; by applying to which, they may cast their burden on the Lord, and experience a renewed application of the blood of sprinkling.

Since the necessity and obligations of prayer arise out of the relation which man bears to his Creator, the efficient performance of the duty will evidently depend on the knowledge we possess of our spiritual state and character. If we are ignorant of ourselves as sinners, if we feel neither hungerings nor thirstings after righteousness, we are destitute of all those motives and impressions, without which all our religious duties will be the loathsome offerings either of hypocrisy or of self-righteousness. The nature of prayer will be easily understood, when, by searching into our hearts, we have discovered the evils and the wants which press upon us ; then we shall give fervent expression to the desires which will predominate,—desires which will embrace all the promises of God, and which will be satisfied with nothing less than the fulfilment of those promises in their plenitude and power.

As prayer is the act of addressing the Deity, it is manifestly of supreme importance that the suppliant should possess Scriptural views of the divine perfections. This is an attainment which essentially enters into every act of rational devotion. Indeed, the right knowledge of ourselves as sinners is so intimately connected with right views of the attributes and

government of God, that the one cannot properly exist without the other. "He that cometh unto God must believe that *he is*, and that he is the Rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Ignorantly to worship an unknown God is to engage in acts of superstition, not of devotion; to yield up our minds to the delusions of false confidence, or to the gloomy and dishonourable suspicions of slavish fear. The self-inflicted penances, and unscriptural invocations of the Church of Rome, arise from mistaken views of the character of Jehovah. When we regard him as the infinite Spirit, as the heart-searching God, as the supreme Majesty, maintaining a boundless dominion, upheld by the principles of inflexible justice and eternal rectitude, we shall then feel the necessity of worshipping him in spirit and in truth; we shall approach such a Being with reverence and with godly fear; and while presenting our petitions, our minds will be filled with solemn awe, and with deep humiliation.

While vivid impressions of the power and holiness of Jehovah are essential to pure devotion, it is not exclusively in the aspect of a Sovereign and of a Judge that the Deity must be contemplated. In the Scriptures his paternal relation is exhibited to us in all its loveliness and tenderness. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so does the Lord pity them that fear him." "God is love." "He delighteth in mercy." To give encouragement to

hope, to draw out the affections and the desires in earnest supplication, the thoughts must dwell on the infinite compassion of God as a Father; and in addressing him we must regard him as our bountiful Benefactor, as our unchangeable Friend. His benefits must be remembered and acknowledged; and the goodness which has bestowed them must be the object of our gratitude and praise. We must adopt both the sentiments and the words of the royal Psalmist, who, when recording the faithfulness and loving-kindness of his God, seems to have had a heart overflowing with feelings of thankfulness, so intense, as to require all the strength and sublimity of language to give them utterance.

One principal object in the duty of prayer is to realize the presence of this Being, who is so great, so holy, and so good. Unless we feel that God is near to us in all his infinite perfections, we can neither experience the emotions, nor perform the duties, of a pure and spiritual worship; but when in prayer we are deeply impressed with a sense of the divine presence, with what self-abasement, with what earnestness, with what enlargement and confidence, shall we offer our petitions and our thanksgivings to him who is the Giver of every good and perfect gift! O, then, whenever you engage in the duties of the closet, endeavour to form right apprehensions of that great and glorious God, whom you are about to address. Believe that he is intimately,

though incomprehensibly near. Abstract your thoughts from all that is worldly and trifling; be composed; be calm; be solemn: thus let your soul fall prostrate before the throne of the infinite Majesty.

But "wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the most high God?" Am I warranted in making a direct and immediate application to Jehovah, without the intervention of some friendly Advocate to plead my cause? These are questions of infinite importance; questions which can be solved only by referring to the oracles of eternal truth. Their testimony is that "there is one God, and one Mediator betwixt God and man, the man Christ Jesus." "No man cometh unto the Father but through him." "Through him we have access by one Spirit unto the Father." "He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

From the preceding statements it is evident, that if our applications to the throne of grace are to be successful, they must be presented in the name, and through the mediation, of the Son of God. His sufferings purchased for us every spiritual blessing, and constitute the grounds of every gracious promise. He now pleads those sufferings on our behalf. Exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, he "now appears in the presence of God for us," clothed in that glorified humanity, which, in the season of his

humiliation, endured the agonies of the cross. Nor has he forgotten the conflicts and the sorrows he experienced in the days of his flesh. "He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." He is, therefore, able to succour them that are tempted. He enters fully into the anxieties and fears of his praying people; he deeply sympathizes with them in their difficulties and trials; in all their afflictions he is afflicted. Thus the sympathy of Christ with believers imparts to his intercession a peculiar and heart-subduing tenderness, while the infinite efficacy of his atonement invests it with invariable prevalence, and insures its certain success.

Whenever, therefore, you approach unto God in prayer, bear in remembrance that Christ is your Advocate above, and that every request must be accompanied with an entire dependance on him; in his name, and in his name alone, are you encouraged to draw near to God; his intercession must have your implicit affiance; you must believe that he is pleading effectually for you, and that through him your supplications will be accepted.

Some, who would be wise above what is written, have contended that it is presumptuous to suppose that God will actually grant the petitions we present to him, because the supposition, they say, would involve us in the difficulty of admitting, that the divine proceedings and purposes are controlled by the prayers of a weak and sinful creature; and that the



immutability, as well as the omnipotence, of God, render such a result impossible. If, on this question, we listen to the sophistries of a false philosophy, they will leave us in the same darkness in which they find us; but if we attend to the dictates of common sense, we shall perceive, that as God is not only unchangeable and omnipotent, but infinitely wise, and just, and good,—his conduct and purposes toward those who sincerely perform the duties he has enjoined must be essentially different from the course which he adopts toward those who disregard his authority. Moreover, let the impression be received, that for God to answer prayer is inconsistent with his perfections, and the most powerful motives by which we are prompted to the exercise will at once become extinct. It is true that the command of God ought to be sufficient; but, constituted as we are, we need those considerations which are addressed, not to our selfishness, but to our self-love, that we may be roused to the requisite exertions. In the pursuit of any earthly object, nothing is so calculated to stimulate to energy and constancy of effort as the conviction that success is certain, if we properly employ the necessary means. The strongest encouragements to prayer arise from the expectation which the believer has, that the blessings which he seeks will be granted. This expectation he is warranted to indulge by the precepts and promises of the gospel. He is even assured that the amount

of benefit he may receive in answer to prayer will be proportioned to the degree of confidence with which his supplications are presented. Those declarations of Scripture which testify that Jehovah actually fulfils the requests of those who offer up the prayer of faith, are so numerous and so explicit, that it is scarcely needful to quote them. The following are worthy of a most serious attention:—"Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you." "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, *believe that ye will receive* them, and ye shall have them." "All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, *believing*, ye shall receive." Here we have promises which most unequivocally affirm, that whatever *spiritual* blessings we ask in prayer will be conferred upon us; provided we "ask in faith, nothing doubting." The promises must be believed; must be relied upon; must be pleaded; and their accomplishment expected with the most unwavering confidence: nor must this confidence be grounded on our sincerity, earnestness, and constancy in prayer; but on the mediation of Christ, and on the faithfulness of God. Here we have a foundation that is rational, Scriptural, and unmoveable: Christ has died; Christ intercedes: God is true; God is love. With these facts before us, we may, according to our spiritual wants and circumstances, appropriate each gracious promise to ourselves, and rejoice in the pleni-

tude of those blessings which are secured to us by the word and oath of the Eternal.

“Let not that man” (that doubteth) “think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.” This is the declaration of an inspired apostle. It is not only the expression of divine authority, but of reason and justice. He who believes not the truth of God, dishonours and insults him. Moreover, if our prayers be offered in unbelief, despondency and discouragement will paralyze our powers and extinguish our desires; there will be neither boldness nor importunity, neither pleading nor wrestling with God. Wearied with unprofitable labour, the excitement which has prompted it will gradually subside; and the anxiety which has been felt will be displaced by that insensibility which is one fearful peculiarity of the carnal mind: unbelief is the cause of this. If the feelings of devotion have been possessed, unbelief has deadened them; if the ardour of desire has been excited, unbelief has suppressed it. Approach God with trembling, but not with the trembling that arises from doubts and suspicions of your heavenly Father’s willingness to sanctify and save you; approach him with boldness, with the boldness of humble confidence, and of steadfast hope; the faith that lays hold of his promise he will reward with the choicest of his blessings.

May this certain anticipation of an answer to prayer extend to temporal as well as spiritual concerns? This is an interesting and an im-

portant question. With proper limitations, I should unhesitatingly reply, Yes. I say, with proper limitations. “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that *if we ask any thing according to his will*, he heareth us.” Now, respecting spiritual blessings, we have the most explicit declarations that it is the will of God that we should abound in love and hope, in peace and joy. In praying for these divine attainments, therefore, we may cherish the most undoubting assurance of success. But respecting our temporal condition and prospects, his purposes are not so specifically, nor so explicitly, stated. In general terms, great and precious promises are given to us, in reference to the present life. “Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.” Let the afflicted believer confidently plead this promise in prayer, and the promise will certainly be fulfilled, perhaps by the removal of the burden; perhaps, as in the case of the apostle, by communicating such a measure of grace as will enable the sufferer to “glory in his infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon him.” Let us suppose the case of a Christian who is in perplexity as to the course he should pursue, relative to some event which bears closely on his interests and happiness, but in which the path of duty and of providence is either veiled in obscurity, or involved in doubt. He naturally seeks direction in prayer: it would be folly for him, in his blindness, to set his heart on any particular

turn of circumstances, which he may think would operate in his favour. But he may, with certainty, expect the fulfilment of such promises as the following; and then his path will be both safe, and honourable, and happy:—"The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord." "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go; I will guide thee with mine eye." "All things work together for good to them that love God."

There is one promise so comprehensive and explicit, that it might be supposed to admit of no restriction, but that it warranted us to exercise an assured expectation of our receiving whatever we might request of God, whether it were a temporal or a spiritual blessing:—"If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, *ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.*" This declaration, which at first sight appears to give an unlimited license, is, in fact, most closely and securely guarded against the abuse to which, by our selfishness, it might have been perverted. "*If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you:*" here we have the characteristics of those to whom the promise is given. And what will be the most intense desires of those who abide in Christ, and who have his words abiding in them? The desire of their hearts will be, "that God in all things may be glorified;" and that their "wills" may be guided by his will. Their intimate union with Christ, and the indwelling of his words in them, will impart that purity of mind, that

tenderness of conscience, that supreme love to God, which will render them scrupulously fearful, lest in things that are not revealed, they should encroach on the divine prerogative, or dictate to infinite wisdom, by making requests which would be inconsistent with the designs of God concerning them. Admitting that we have permission to adopt this and other similar promises, in their most unqualified sense, it is nevertheless obvious that we ought to be extremely cautious in the use of our liberty. Though we might not ask for any thing that is expressly forbidden in the word of God, yet, unless we were infallible in judgment, and perfect in knowledge, we could not be guilty of greater folly and presumption than to pray unconditionally for those things that are temporal which *we* might consider essential to our "good." Nor could a greater calamity befall us than to have every such request literally fulfilled. The constant protection, guidance, and blessing of God are most faithfully promised to his people, and may, therefore, be confidently expected; but in those particular cases and events, in our personal and domestic history, in reference to which the will of God is not specified, a firm trust in his rectitude, and submission to his authority, are at once our interest and our duty. If we sacrifice our own feelings and our own selfishness, if our only aim be to serve and honour him in all things, we may then safely commit our concerns to his care, and

repose entire reliance on his wisdom and love. If we leave ourselves in his hands, his wisdom will direct us, his love will overshadow us.

It is not for the supply of your own wants merely, nor for your own salvation exclusively, that you are to present your petitions to God. The spirit of prayer and the spirit of selfishness are utterly incompatible. Having felt your own wretched state as a sinner, you cannot but commiserate the condition of those who are in darkness and in the shadow of death; and this commiseration will prompt you to intercede at the footstool of mercy on behalf of perishing sinners. Pray for the conversion of those around you; pray that your country may be filled with that righteousness which "exalteth a nation;" pray that the world may be delivered from the darkening and degrading influence of error and of sin; and plead with confidence those divine oracles which predict the universal triumph of truth and holiness. Implore the divine blessing on all evangelical missionaries, and missionary institutions; on the circulation of the Scriptures, and of religious tracts; on sabbath school instruction; and, in short, on all the means and agents employed for the propagation of the gospel, both at home and abroad. Pray that *every* Christian church may be favoured with perpetual purity, peace, and enlargement, and that efficiency may be given to the labours of all the faithful ministers of Christ.

As a Methodist, you will offer up special

and fervent supplications on behalf of the ministers, institutions, and various interests of your own religious community. Nor will you fail to make a distinct and affectionate remembrance of the ministers and members of the *society* with which you are connected.

The natural feelings of your heart, sanctified by religion, will also dictate daily and earnest intercessions for your immediate relatives and intimate friends, more particularly when they are placed in circumstances of anxiety or of suffering.

While imploring blessings on your fellow-creatures, you will not only be acting in obedience to the benevolent injunctions of the gospel, but you will be instrumental in communicating the richest benefits to those who may be the objects of your sympathy. In praying for the spiritual good of others, you may pray with the conviction that you are heard by Him who would have every human being to bear his image and to partake of his favour. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

Prayer ought to be, and doubtless might be, invariably offered with fervour and freedom; but, alas! how often have we to complain of listlessness and languor! How frequently do coldness and distraction darken our minds, and deaden our feelings! Too often is it the case that we have to take up as a cross that which ought always to be enjoyed as a privilege. Is this necessary? Certainly not. We are com-



manded to "pray without ceasing;" and as a literal obedience to this precept is impracticable, and, therefore, cannot be intended, we may conclude that one design of it is to assure us of the possibility, as well as to enforce the obligation, of our constantly possessing the *spirit of prayer*.

The spirit of prayer consists of the prevalence of those desires and impressions which at all times render the duty welcome and delightful, and under the influence of which we address God with humble boldness and wrestling earnestness. To maintain these desires and impressions in constant operation, is an object of the utmost importance; and, indeed, a matter of imperative necessity. I trust that, by attending to the following directions, you will be enabled to prevent the declension of those feelings, without which prayer will be unmeaning verbiage, and every act of devotion an act of lifeless formality.

Let me, first, advise you to *secure adequate opportunities for the exercise of prayer*. If, from the pressure of worldly or domestic engagements, or from any other cause, you allow your seasons for retirement to be *few and brief*, the ardour of desire will be quenched. Nothing is more calculated to extinguish the flame of devotion than a hurried and superficial performance of closet duties. Moreover, to enter fully into our wants and circumstances, and to give such utterance to our desires as will

show that we really value the blessings which we seek, will require *TIME*: but when a very few hasty moments, and a very few hasty expressions, are made to suffice, there can be no explicit statement of our spiritual necessities; and when such a practice becomes a fixed habit, it indicates a strange indifference to those great and precious promises which are given to those who, by fervent and enlarged petitions, *make known* their requests unto God.

Endeavour, therefore, so to arrange your occupations and engagements as to be able to appropriate a proper portion of *time* to closet duties. If you can, for this purpose, appoint and observe a fixed hour in the morning and also in the evening, so much the better; but, if such a regulation is impracticable, it is not obligatory. The precise hour is not of so much consequence as the space of time that is occupied in these sacred exercises. How long this space should be must be determined by your own circumstances, and the dictates of an enlightened conscience. If you have time fully at your own command, and are really athirst for salvation, you will not deem an hour in the morning and an hour in the evening too much to be devoted to prayer, reading the Scriptures, and self-examination. But how many are there whose restrictions render it almost, if not quite, impossible to employ even one entire hour daily in the exercises of devotion! Should these difficulties

be yours, remember that God is thoroughly acquainted with them; and whatever may be their nature, if you conscientiously endeavour to surmount them, he will, in due time, make your way plain, by removing those hinderances which now encompass and discourage you; and if your present obstacles should continue, and are not needlessly magnified, nor pleaded as an excuse for sloth and negligence, your heavenly Father will richly compensate you for the self-denial and decision you may have to practise. He does not require impossibilities; but he demands that which is possible, even if it be at the cost of some personal sacrifice. Only be faithful and you shall in nowise lose your reward. On reflection, you will, perhaps, discover, that if all the time which, previously to your conversion, was squandered in loitering, in the indulgence of vain thoughts, and in frivolous gossip, were now duly appreciated and improved, you would not be destitute of opportunities for private devotion. By also limiting the hours of sleep to what may be strictly necessary for health, as well as by industry in your calling, you will be able to secure some portions of the day, which you may justly call your own, and which, without encroaching on the rights of others, you may consistently and profitably consecrate to communion with yourself, and with your God.

*Let me earnestly recommend you to imitate the examples of David and Daniel, by retiring, not only morning and evening, but at noonday,*

*for the purpose of presenting your supplications to your heavenly Father.* If your mid-day retirement be but for ten, or even for five minutes, you will find it to exert a powerfully quickening and refreshing influence; nor will this influence be the less beneficial to yourself, should your petitions on this occasion consist entirely of intercessions on behalf of others. By thus allotting the subjects of prayer to their separate and appropriate seasons in the course of each day, you will be freed from the necessity of protracting each exercise to any disproportionate length.

*Cultivate the habit of ejaculatory prayer.* This is within the power of every one. At all times it is seasonable, and in all places practicable. It need not hinder any lawful employment, nor interfere with any relative duty. It is a mighty weapon against temptation; and, in the midst of worldly distractions, it recalls the heart from its wanderings, and sweetly soothes its anxieties; it effectually checks the first encroachments of sin, and raises the soul to uninterrupted intercourse with God. By this simple but ready expedient, you will secure unceasing communications of divine illumination and strength, and be able to preserve that calmness and seriousness of feeling so essential to your religious advancement. Indeed, nothing so surely indicates, nor so powerfully promotes spirituality of mind, as the habit of frequently lifting up the heart to God in short and fervent supplications. Nor

can the value of such a habit be too highly appreciated as a means of keeping the heart in a state of constant preparation for the more lengthened exercise of devotion.

*If you would maintain the spirit of prayer, carefully avoid bringing guilt upon your conscience.* It is needless to attempt to prove that the shame, darkness, and defilement which accompany a sense of guilt, will produce a lamentable unfitness of mind for drawing near to God. The confidence which he requires in prayer is in such circumstances lost; and at a time when the necessities of the soul are most urgent, its reluctance to seek their removal is almost unconquerable. That you may be exempted from such melancholy results, you must not only abstain from flagrant acts of transgression, but you must perpetually watch against all the infirmities of your nature. Guard especially against vain thoughts, unholy tempers, worldly anxieties, and unprofitable conversation: these are evils which most effectually disincline and disqualify the heart for the exercises of devotion. Cultivate a holy tenderness of conscience, which will render you keenly alive to every approach of spiritual danger, as well as susceptible of the feeblest influence of temptation. While you sedulously strive to keep your heart free from the defilement of actual sin, be equally faithful in the discharge of every personal and social obligation. Whenever an opportunity of doing good is favourably pre-

sented, embrace and improve it. Let the means and talents which God has given you be diligently employed in his service. If, from considerations of selfishness or of false shame, you shrink from the performance of plain and imperative duty, the consequence will be a sense of alienation from God, which will divest prayer of its attractions, or which will, more properly speaking, excite within you repugnance toward an exercise which ought to be entered upon with earnestness and delight. That you may keep your mind clear of the self-reproaches of guilt, you must be watchful. There is a strong reciprocal influence between watchfulness and prayer. They stimulate and strengthen each other; nor can the spirit of prayer exist without the habit of watchfulness. They are inseparable. Obey, then, the commands of your divine Master. "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." Do this, and your general frame of mind will be devotional, and in your approaches to the throne of grace you will realize the presence and power of Jehovah.

*Despise not any lawful means, however apparently insignificant, of overcoming the difficulties you may experience in devotional duties.* Dulness and distraction in prayer may sometimes be the result of physical causes. Long continued bodily or mental exertion may so exhaust the spirits, as to incapacitate us for any vigorous effort of a religious nature. Bodily indisposition will, at times, exert an unfavourable in-

fluence. Drowsiness will also cause a state of stupor and inertness. To prevent this last-mentioned evil, care should be taken not to defer the devotional exercises of the evening, until the frame is so wearied, as to be unequal to the duty. When your difficulties arise from other sources, they may often be removed by praying in an audible voice : this has a powerful effect in rousing and fixing the attention. When such a practice is inexpedient, try a change of position. Either standing, or pacing to and fro in your apartment, will often enable you to collect and compose your thoughts. In case of sickness, the posture which is most easy to yourself will be most acceptable to God ; but to those who are in a state of health and wakefulness, kneeling is the most seemly attitude in which to address the Deity. While kneeling, it is better to keep the body in an upright position, so that there may be no indication of sloth or self-indulgence ; and in order in such exercises to preserve the mind from the influence of external objects, the eyes should be closed. Let it not be imagined that these things are enjoined as matters of invariable duty : they are simply suggested for consideration and trial. Your own experience and judgment must determine the extent of their adoption.

*That you may possess the spirit of prayer, exercise an humble dependance on divine influence.* Never forget that the spirit of prayer is the gift of God. It is, nevertheless, an attainment that

you must diligently seek and cultivate ; bearing in remembrance that the views, desires, and impressions which are essential to its existence, are the result of divine agency. Upon this agency, therefore, you must depend for that illumination which will make you acquainted with your own character, and also with the character of God. Upon this agency you must depend not only for exciting those desires and emotions, the expression of which constitutes the act of supplication, but also for that confidence, humiliation, and fervour, which belong to a truly spiritual worship. When you pray, you must "pray in the Holy Ghost." By resigning yourself to his government, your thoughts will be under proper restraint ; the flame of devotion will be enkindled, and its blessedness experienced ; you will be admitted to delightful intercourse with heaven ; God himself will visit you, and the light of his countenance will shine upon you.

The distraction and deadness in devotion, which are so often complained of, frequently arise from the self-sufficiency with which we enter upon the duty. We too often attempt it in our own strength. Nor do we properly recognise the fact that the Holy Spirit is present to help our infirmities, to enlighten and invigorate our minds. We are not adequately impressed with the conviction, that unless he assist us in prayer, we "can do nothing." When, therefore, you are labouring under darkness and deadness in your closet exercises,



remember that while subordinate means of removing them are both allowable and obligatory, the only efficient means of being quickened and illuminated, is to rely on the promised agency of the Spirit of God.

*This reliance on the agency of the Spirit is especially needful in those cases of difficulty which arise from satanic influence.* The malice and power of Satan are often vigorously employed for the purpose of obstructing our intercourse with God. If the great enemy can indispose our hearts to devotional exercises; if he can excite a disrelish for them, or prevail upon us to think lightly of them, he has gained an immense, an awful advantage. I doubt not but many of the strange thoughts and impressions which sometimes so suddenly and forcibly seize the mind in prayer, are injected by this artful and malignant being. If he can induce a habit of forgetfulness or inattention; if he can weary out our patience by multiplying our conflicts; if he can reconcile us to the formal practice of devotion, without its vitality and power, he has gained his point, and will then gladly allow us to bear the name of Christian, and even to maintain a sanctimonious profession of religion. Having obtained possession of the citadel, he will have no objection to the outworks exhibiting the aspect of peace and security. That you may repel the assaults of this evil one, you must be "strengthened with all might by the Spirit in the inner man:" when, in prayer, "the enemy cometh in like a flood,

the Spirit of the Lord can alone lift up the standard" of victory "against him."

It will not be improper to remind you, that the assistance of the Spirit in prayer may not always result in fluency of speech. 'The "intercession" which "he makes for the saints," by exciting and directing their minds, may sometimes be productive of "groanings which cannot be uttered." There may be that overpowering sense of the divine majesty, and of our own unworthiness, and that intense longing after spiritual blessings, which can find no adequate expression in the compass of human language; but prostrate and speechless before God, the heart can ascend to him only in sighs, and groans, and tears. Words cannot reach the depth of its emotions, nor embody the fullness of its feelings.

How powerful are the inducements, how weighty the obligations, how abundant the encouragements which constrain us to fervent and believing prayer! Time would fail, language would fail, in attempting to enumerate its advantages. Viewed simply as an exercise of intellectual and religious discipline, its benefits are incalculable. It requires that fixedness of attention, that concentration of thought, which gives tone and vigour to the mental powers; and by leading them to the contemplation of spiritual objects, it elevates and enlarges the sphere of intellectual vision; while the constancy which ought to mark our observance of the duty will exert a powerful influence on our

general character, by imparting to it decision, ensuring its consistency, and thereby heightening its excellence and value. Moreover, those sentiments and impressions which are essential to prayer, by being frequently brought into operation, acquire the power of established principles, supplanting the evil propensities of the carnal mind, and assuming their rightful ascendancy in the heart. Our hatred to sin will necessarily be strengthened by the oft-repeated remembrance and sorrowful confession of our iniquities before God. 'The daily perception of our manifold wants and dangers, with the consequent acknowledgment of our absolute dependance on divine mercy, will naturally tend to the destruction of our pride, and to sink us in the depths of self-abasement. Our gratitude and love to God will obviously become more intense and more permanent, by often recalling the unmerited favours conferred upon us, and by often uttering the praises and thanksgivings which our sense of obligation will imperatively dictate. And how abundantly will our faith be invigorated by our frequently reposing that sure confidence in the Redeemer and in his promises, which is so essential an element of that prayer which avails with God!

Numerous and valuable as are the beneficial effects immediately resulting from the exercise of prayer, these are not the only nor indeed the most important of its advantages. Prayer not only exerts a highly salutary influence on our minds, but it actually procures the bless-

ings which we supplicate and need. Nor can the believer ascertain in this world the extent of privileges bestowed upon him in answer to prayer. Eternity alone can unfold to him the calamities, temptations, and sorrows, from which he is now exempted, in consequence of his laying before God the circumstances that perplex, and the heavier trials that threaten him. By his prayerfulness, he ensures his preservation from innumerable snares, his rescue from many an unseen danger. Blessings, rich beyond the power of human calculation, are given unto him in fulfilment of those promises which are made to believing prayer. A constant increase of light, purity, strength, and peace, an unspeakable joy, a triumphant hope, a closer and yet closer conformity to the divine image, are among the legitimate fruits of prayer. With what certainty will you vanquish Satan! with what stern and successful defiance will you resist the fascinations of sin! with what constancy will you proceed to the glory that awaits you, if you continue instant in prayer! Be faithful then in the performance of this sacred duty. Let no worldly claims hinder, let no difficulties dishearten, let no infernal devices beguile you. In spite of every obstacle, unmoved by manifold temptations, under the pressure of affliction, in the midst of multifarious engagements, persevere in prayer; pray without ceasing. Be minute in the statement of your wants. Lay your circumstances fully and distinctly before God. Tell him all your

anxieties. Mention your besetting sins. Confess your secret faults. Thus unreservedly open your heart to God; and he will communicate to you the riches of his grace, out of his infiniteness. Persist in prayer, in fervent believing prayer, and you shall trample upon sin and death, and put to flight the armies of hell; persist in prayer, and all things shall be yours: if needful, the world shall be yours; with indubitable certainty, heaven with its transcendent glories shall be yours; Christ, in the magnitude of his power and of his love, shall be yours, and God shall be all in all.

I have now to direct your attention to a duty which, to every pious, enlightened, and inquiring mind, is peculiarly interesting, as well as supremely important. The duty to which I refer is that of **SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES**. The book which we term "the Bible" is the word of the living God. This book communicates all the requisite information respecting our duty and our happiness. It contains a clear and comprehensive announcement of the law of God; faithfully informs us of our fallen and perishing condition; reveals to us the method which God has devised for our recovery; appoints the means which we are to use for our restoration to the divine favour; warns us of the awful consequences of rejecting the proffered mercy; and gives promises of present acceptance and future recompense to every penitent believer. It foretells the proceedings of a judgment to come; describes the horrors of

hell, and the glories of heaven. How sublime, how momentous, are the truths of God's word ! How powerful are its claims to our serious investigation, to our thankful reception !

By this all-sufficient rule of faith and practice your religious opinions must be formed, your religious experience tested, and your whole conduct governed. Through its medium alone can you become savingly acquainted with the character of God, and with the person and offices of Christ. When the Holy Spirit acts upon you, it is by the instrumentality of the truth. When he comforts, enlightens, and sanctifies, it is by the application of truth to the heart.

An enlarged and experimental acquaintance with the Scriptures is the only effectual preservative from error. When persons professing sound principles turn aside from them in order to embrace any of the dangerous delusions now prevalent, the defection may almost invariably be attributed to a partial and superficial knowledge of the word of God. When the mind is well furnished with the arguments and statements which the sacred oracles supply, it can more speedily detect, and more easily refute, those sophistries by which error is attempted to be palmed on human credulity. Divine truth possesses a power peculiarly its own. When made the subject of diligent and prayerful investigation, it acquires an authority over the conscience which the lofty pretensions of error cannot dethrone ; and diffuses a light

through the understanding which the darkness of error cannot overpower.

A comprehensive acquaintance with the Scriptures is necessary in order that our hearts may be established in the doctrines of the gospel, that our hope may rest on its right foundation, and that our peace may flow from its only legitimate source, Christ and him crucified. He who properly studies his Bible is led to see the harmony and beauty of revealed truth; he perceives that the plan of salvation is admirably adapted to the circumstances of man, and at the same time worthy of the perfections of God; that while it displays infinite wisdom and benevolence, it secures the rights of insulted justice, and glorifies the immaculate holiness of Deity. Nothing, indeed, can be more obvious than the necessity of a Scriptural knowledge of the objects of faith, in order that our faith may be rational and steadfast: equally necessary is it that we should be acquainted with the motives that ought to govern, and the excellences that claim, our affections, in order that we may be "rooted and grounded in love."

If you are anxious faithfully to serve God, you are, of course, anxious to know the duties which constitute that service. These duties are explicitly stated in the Scriptures. If you are desirous of acting toward your fellow-men in accordance with your obligations as a Christian and as a rational being, you must be equally desirous of knowing the extent of those obligations. In the Scriptures they are clearly un-

folded. You already begin to feel your need of counsel to direct you in cases of difficulty, and to lead you in a safe path during your earthly pilgrimage. In the Bible are the profoundest maxims, and the wisest admonitions: here precepts are enforced, and principles are inculcated, which, if acted upon in the ordinary affairs of life, would preserve us from innumerable dangers, anxieties, and troubles. In short, if you would attain dignity of character, purity of heart, and spirituality of mind, you must study your Bible: these sublime attainments can never be possessed by him who is wilfully ignorant of the oracles of God.

As in every other private duty, so in this, constancy and regularity are of supreme importance. Never allow a day of your existence to pass over, without reading some portion of the word of God. You would never think of abstaining for a whole day from the food which nourishes the body, simply on the plea that you had not *time* to partake of it; yet how many on this plea, and on this only, neglect for days together that word which is the bread of life, the nourishment of the soul! If this nourishment be but seldom resorted to, there will be, instead of the maturity and fruitfulness of fervent piety, the leanness and barrenness of mere profession. Our memories are so treacherous in reference to religious truths, that in order to their establishment in our hearts, we need line upon line, and precept upon precept. Our good impressions are so apt to subside, that it is requi-



site that the word which has produced them should be brought frequently before our minds, that by a repetition of its influence, it may abide with us for ever. The devices of Satan are so numerous, and so calculated to perplex and mislead us, that we need a daily application to the word of God, that being supplied with the sword of the Spirit, and with the shield of faith, we may be competent to resist and to overcome the fiery darts of the wicked one. Consider it, therefore, as imperatively binding upon you to read the Scriptures DAILY.

The *extent* of your daily reading of the Scriptures must, of course, depend on the time you may be able to spare from other duties; the performance of some of which is unavoidable, while others are essential to the fulfilment of your Christian course. By reading three chapters each day, you will peruse the whole Bible in the space of a year; and without attaching unnecessary importance to such a practice, I would, if it be within your power, earnestly recommend its adoption. Two chapters might be read in the morning; one out of the historical books of the Old Testament, and the other out of the New. And in the evening another chapter out of those of the Old Testament, commencing with the book of Job, and terminating with Malachi. But if such a plan *cannot* be pursued without too much restricting the time for prayer and self-examination, nor without encroaching on those hours which your employers may justly claim from you, you must

content yourself with reading smaller portions daily. The quantity read is not of so much consequence, as the properly digesting it. If you would profit by the Scriptures, if you would rightly apprehend their meaning, and would have your mind impressed by their statements, you must read deliberately, and not rapidly. As you proceed, you must frequently pause. You must deeply ponder the truths and facts which are laid before you; you must study their connection, their application to yourself, and their relative importance. Unless, while perusing the Scriptures, you thus endeavour to bring them home to your own conscience, and to make them the food of your own soul, you neither make the use of them which God designs, nor treat them with the reverence which he claims. You must solemnly purpose to perform the duties which they enjoin, earnestly seek the privileges which they promise, and as earnestly pray to be preserved from the evils which they condemn. Such are the exercises of mind which are indispensable to a profitable perusal of the Scriptures. When, therefore, other necessary and lawful engagements disable you from reading an entire chapter, read part of one; read slowly and seriously. Give to some passages a lengthened attention; peruse them again and again: thus they will be engraved upon your heart. And although you may not, by this method, read the whole Bible in so short a space of time as you may wish, you will realize what will be of in-

finitely greater value,—a more rapid growth in the knowledge of divine things; a more enlarged acquaintance with the character and will of God. On this duty two points should be kept steadily in view, and should be invariably acted upon: the first is, that the Scriptures be *daily* read; and the second is, that they be read *deliberately*.

In the performance of this duty, adopt such methods, and avail yourself of such helps, as will lead you to a right understanding of the sacred text. The Bible presents its apparent contradictions: they are, however, only apparent, and may be perfectly reconciled. The Bible contains difficult passages; but the most important of these difficulties can be satisfactorily explained. Written in remote ages, at different periods, and in distant countries, it is not surprising that the Scriptures contain some “things hard to be understood.” It would, indeed, have been most surprising, if this had not been the case. If all its allusions and all its phraseology had been familiar to us, such a fact would have belied its own pretensions; it would have proved that it was not written by the men to whom it is attributed, but by persons living in the scenes that actually surround us, well acquainted with the existing forms and customs of society, influenced by the same habits of thought, and naturally adopting the same modes of expression.

There is one peculiarity in the Bible, which if it do not prove its divine authenticity, is a

strong recommendation of its claims,—that upon those points which relate to our duty and our salvation, its language is as plain as language can be. If, when declaring the law of God, or when unfolding the scheme of redemption, the sacred writers had made it their incessant, exclusive, and most laborious effort, to express themselves in a style of perfect simplicity, I do not see how they could possibly have invented terms more clear, more definite, and more intelligible than the terms actually adopted. Prejudice, pride, or carelessness will twist and torture the plainest passages, and mutilate or destroy the most self-evident propositions. But no one who reads the Bible with the reverence which its lofty pretensions demand, and which it ought to receive until their falsehood can be proved ;—no one who reads the Bible with the attention, candour, and seriousness which even common sense dictates, can possibly fail to ascertain its meaning on those subjects in which our everlasting interests are involved.

The difficulties which the word of God contains, so far from being objectionable, are the reverse. They have brought into existence the most vigorous exertions of the mightiest intellects ; they have prompted to the acquisition of immense stores of learning ; they have caused the sacred text to pass through the severest ordeals of criticism, and subjected its claims to the most rigid scrutiny. And it may be undeniably affirmed, that the greatest amount of intelligence and of mental energy prevails in

those communities where the Bible is most generally circulated, and its contents most diligently studied.

Let me, therefore, exhort you, not only to read, but to *study*, the sacred volume. It presents to you an inexhaustible mine of spiritual wealth, but which you must penetrate and explore, in order to enrich yourself with the treasures which it contains. Its historical facts, its biographical sketches, its precepts of duty, its statements of doctrine, its predictions, its promises, its threatenings, its disclosures of the judgment-day, and of the scenes of eternity, all lay before you topics of thrilling interest, and of supreme importance; topics which demand the most industrious investigation; and which, by their enlightening and hallowing influence, amply compensate for all the toil and patience which you may devote to a volume bearing credentials so extraordinary and so divine.

To all who have the opportunity, I would most earnestly recommend the study of the Scriptures in their original languages: through their medium, a flood of light is poured upon many passages, the fulness and beauty of which can be but imperfectly conveyed by any translation, however literal. Should your circumstances render the acquisition of Greek and Hebrew impracticable, I would, if your pecuniary means will admit, *urge* you to purchase Horne's "Introduction to the Study of the Scriptures." This work is a rich storehouse of Biblical knowledge. A careful perusal of its pages,

and a frequent reference to them, would furnish invaluable assistance toward a right understanding of the Scriptures. It embodies, in a condensed form, almost all the information and directions on the subject, needful for the general reader; and is a book which no Christian should be without, who can afford to purchase it. For the accommodation of those whose means are limited, Mr. Horne has published an abridgment, which may be had at a comparatively low price.\*

In purchasing a Bible, be sure to select one which has the marginal references. These, though, I fear, often disregarded, have an incalculable value. If you can avail yourself of no other assistance, this of itself will frequently be found sufficient. If you will fairly try the experiment, you will be surprised, as well as delighted, with the discoveries you will make of the meaning of God's word, by the adoption of this simple and easy method. For instance, as you are reading a Bible of the kind here recommended, you come to a passage which you cannot understand; you read the verses which immediately precede and follow it, but the difficulty is not removed: you observe, however, that between the lines of this obscure portion small letters are inserted; you find these same letters in the margin, and that they point you to chapters and verses, either in the same book or in other books of the sacred volume; you look out these chapters and verses,

\* This abridgment may be obtained at the Book Room, price \$1.00.

they again refer you to others, and, if necessary, you find them; but it will generally be the case, that by the time you have read the first references, the difficult passage will have lost its obscurity, and be so clearly opened to you, as to become both intelligible and instructive. The adoption of the same practice, with passages that are easy to be understood, will show you how fully one part of Scripture is confirmed by another. By thus comparing spiritual things with spiritual, you will see that the Bible is often the best interpreter of itself.

You will not find it an unprofitable exercise, if, in addition to your daily allotted portion, you occasionally read an entire book at once. By adopting this method, you will more clearly perceive the connection and design of what you read: you will find this especially to be the case in reading the Epistles; nor will it lessen, but rather heighten, the interest of the historical books. And this is unquestionably the best mode of reading those parts of the Pentateuch which prescribe the erection of the tabernacle, and the ceremonial observances of the Jewish religion.

Let your perusal of the Scriptures be continually prompted and governed by an ardent love of truth; by a supreme desire to know, and to do, the will of God. Purity of motive is in all things essential; but particularly so in studying the Bible. If every Biblical student had possessed this qualification, the world would never have been cursed with those cor-

rupted forms of Christianity by which multitudes are infatuated and enslaved. Do not allow your mind to be absorbed in the investigation of curious and unprofitable questions; but let your aim be to acquire a saving knowledge of the gospel. Let it be your purpose to "receive the truth IN THE LOVE OF IT;" not as a subject of mere speculation, nor as furnishing matter for successful controversy; but as unfolding the foundation of hope, and the medium of access to God; as directing you in the path of duty, and as leading you to happiness and heaven. While reading the Scriptures, therefore, consider the infinite importance of rightly apprehending the doctrines which they reveal; and be determined, that neither prejudice, nor pride, nor indifference, nor unbelief, shall stand in the way of a cordial and thankful reception of "the truth as it is in Jesus."

As a moral and responsible agent, it is not only your privilege, but your duty, to exercise your own judgment in your study of the sacred oracles. Whatever they may clearly announce, you are bound to believe: in this respect, the best exercise of human judgment is implicit submission to the authority of God. But your convictions must be formed independently of *human* authority. You must think for yourself. You are not to adopt an opinion simply because it has been advocated by a particular individual or party; you are to adopt it because God has revealed it.

While exercising the unquestionable right of



private judgment, guard against the opposite extreme, of treating the decisions of others with contempt. Deference is undoubtedly due to those who to extensive learning and fervent piety have united patient labour and strict impartiality in studying and explaining the word of God. And when we are constrained to differ from those whose capabilities and advantages were vastly superior to ours, and while we maintain our own views conscientiously and firmly, it behooves us to express them, at least, with modesty; and while we feel certain that the wisest and holiest of men may err, it behooves us not to forget, that we also are fallible.

The weakness and fallibility of our own judgments, even in their most vigorous and deliberate efforts, evince the necessity of earnest prayer for divine illumination. The human heart has naturally a strong repugnance to divine truth; for "the carnal mind is enmity against God, and is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Nothing but the agency of the Holy Ghost can conquer this opposition to the humbling doctrines of the gospel. And how many are there of those who in the course of professional duty frequently read the Scriptures, to whom the Bible is a sealed book, a dead letter! How many are the facts which verify the apostle's statement, that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned; they are foolishness unto him!" While you are reading

the sacred page, beseech God to open the eyes of your understanding, that you may "behold wondrous things out of his law." Our Lord promised that the Comforter, whom he would send, should "guide his people into all truth," and that he should "take of the things of Christ and show them unto us." Recognise the Holy Spirit as your instructor. Rely on his gracious influence. Illuminated by him, you shall have freedom of thought, without self-sufficiency; humility of heart, without intellectual enslavement; and enlargement of mind, without the visions and freaks of an undisciplined imagination. This divine Agent will remove darkness, and destroy unbelief; he will apply the truth to your conscience, give you a perception of its beauty, and a full experience of its power. Implore, then, the gift of the Holy Spirit, that by his gracious energy your mind may be invigorated and directed in its efforts to obtain a saving acquaintance with the word of God.

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## CHAPTER VI.

ON THE SOCIAL MEANS OF GRACE,—PUBLIC WORSHIP AND THE LORD'S SUPPER.

It might seem unnecessary to urge a regular attendance on the PUBLIC WORSHIP of God. The desires, wants, and difficulties, common to every Christian, might be supposed to furnish

reasons and impulses sufficiently powerful to ensure an eager and constant observance of this duty. There is, however, too much reason to fear that some professing Christians are, in this matter, governed more by considerations of convenience, than by those of duty. Obstacles are frequently yielded to, which might be prevented by a little foresight, or which might be surmounted by a moderate share of self-denial and decision. Undoubtedly there are some, and in every large society, I might say, many, whose circumstances and obligations render their *regular* attendance on public worship absolutely impossible. Those who are thus situated will, if they feel rightly, regard their unavoidable absence from the house of God as the loss of a privilege, as a painful sacrifice; no other engagements will, for the time being, be viewed as objects of preference, but as occasions of submission, as calling for the exercise of patient acquiescence in what is felt to be a real and unwelcome privation.

Those who have the sabbath entirely at their own disposal, experience but few, if any, of these difficulties, except when visited by personal or domestic affliction. Their course is consequently plain: they can neither be too thankful for their advantages, nor too diligent in the improvement of them. Should *they* allow either caprice, or self-indulgence, or indifference, or the unfavourable state of the weather, to prevent them from *hearing* the gospel in their

own chapel, when the opportunity is presented, their absence can be regarded as nothing less than an act of wilful and criminal neglect: a neglect which indicates a lamentably low state of religious feeling, as well as a feeble sense of religious obligation.

Let me exhort you to repel those false reasonings and excuses which would induce you to undervalue the advantages of social worship, or which would weaken the force of its claims upon you. Let nothing but insurmountable obstacles, or the imperative dictates of some other duty, prevent your attendance at the sanctuary when the hour of worship arrives. If you are *necessarily* placed in a situation in which your religious privileges are restricted, you must meekly bear the restriction, trusting in God for its removal, and, in the mean time, eagerly avail yourself of every means of spiritual improvement that may be within your reach. Are you bound by the ties of a young but numerous family, and without the assistance which would enable you to resort more frequently to the house of God? You must endeavour to devise plans and to make arrangements by which you may enjoy this great privilege as often as practicable. Where both the heads of a family are members of the society, these arrangements may easily be carried into effect. Where it is necessary that one of the parents should always remain at home, this necessity may be supplied by each alternately; and thus each will secure equal opportunities

of hearing the word of life. I have known men, professing godliness, who have regularly attended the chapel, but whose wives were never to be seen there, the cause of whose absence has been the husband's unwillingness to take any share of domestic duty. Such men must surely believe that women have no souls : whatever their belief may be, their conduct, to say the least of it, is unkind and inconsistent, and involves a responsibility which they would do well to remember.

Should you engage in the duties of sabbath-school teacher, you will, to some extent, lessen your opportunities of attending public worship. But though this is a sacrifice to which you will consent for the sake of benefiting others, yet it is one which must, in justice to yourself, have its limits ; it must not be allowed to interfere too much with the attention due to the ordinances of God's house.

What I am anxious to impress upon you is this, that you are, as a professing Christian, bound by the most weighty considerations to unite as frequently as possible in the public worship of God ; and that your occasional non-observance of it should result either from the pressure of circumstances over which you have no control, or from the performance of some other duty the claims of which are indispensable.

If you are actuated by right motives in this matter, you will not needlessly absent yourself from the sabbath forenoon service ; on the con-

trary, you will appreciate it as the most favourable time for listening with undistracted attention to the truths of salvation. Neither will you needlessly manifest any partiality or preference in the selection of your minister; you will not generally absent yourself when Mr. — is appointed, but be present when his colleague is expected; neither will you follow your favourite from chapel to chapel, in the contiguous parts of the circuit. Such conduct is unbecoming, and may subject you to unpleasant observations and injurious suspicions: it is censurable; for it is leaning upon an arm of flesh; it is looking to man, and not to God, as the source of spiritual improvement; and is also treating with injustice those of your ministers who may feel as anxious to promote your salvation as the one whom you so ardently admire.

Never absent yourself from your accustomed place of worship merely because a collection has been announced. It is to be regretted that when these occasions arrive, so many should find it inconvenient to attend. A highly respectable minister once observed to me, "I am always popular at N—— street, when there happens to be a collection at C—— street; for many of our people on that side will then leave their own chapel, and flock to hear me." Now, to leave a place of worship, merely for the sake of escaping the collection, is highly reprehensible. If all were to act thus, the interests of Methodism would be fatally injured;

for it is one of the glories of Methodism, that it subsists without coercion, and that, humanly speaking, it is dependant on the free-will offerings of its members and supporters. The practice here referred to, is, in many cases, shamefully mean and dishonourable ; and in all cases unnecessary. Where poverty may be pleaded as the excuse, it should be remembered that, if no more can be afforded, the smallest coin of the realm, given with a cheerful heart, will not be rejected nor unblessed by the great Head of the church ; and if even this cannot be spared, it will be more consistent in itself to allow the plate to pass you, than, from pride or false shame, to absent yourself from the place to which you are accustomed to resort.

Avoid *late* attendance. This is a serious evil, the existence of which is deeply to be deplored. It is gratifying to know that there are some congregations comparatively exempt from it ; but there are others where its prevalence is awfully striking. Difficulties will, doubtless, occasionally occur, which may frustrate the best intentions ; but it is impossible to believe that these difficulties can be experienced every sabbath, by all the individuals and families who are faulty in this particular. The more general cause, it is to be feared, is indolence, or want of arrangement, or forgetfulness of the progress of time. Were this evil viewed in its true aspect and character, it would neither be tolerated nor practised to its present extent ; and were individual determination and effort strenuously

directed against it, it would soon disappear. Let me prevail upon you, my dear reader, solemnly to resolve that you will employ *your* personal exertions and influence in both avoiding and preventing a practice so strongly to be deprecated. Some consideration is due to the feelings of your minister : how satisfactory and cheering must it be to him to find, on entering the pulpit, a congregation ready to unite with him in the first exercises of the sanctuary ! on the contrary, how painful and discouraging to witness a large number of vacant sittings, the greater part of which become occupied immediately after the first prayer ! Think you that in all this there is nothing calculated to depress the spirits, and to disturb that holy calmness which is so necessary to the efficient discharge of pulpit duties ? Late attendance is also inconsistent with a proper regard to the feelings of the congregation. You cannot enter the chapel after the commencement of a service without occasioning some interruption to others in the performance of their duties. A pious elderly female was once questioned as to the cause of her invariably early attendance at public worship : her reply was, that “ she made it one part of her religion not to disturb the religion of others.” This is a reply worthy of remembrance, and which develops a principle worthy of universal adoption. But those considerations which ought to have the greatest weight, are such as arise from the attention which is due to your own spiritual interests



and from the reverence which you owe to God. By late attendance you not only deprive yourself of the benefit which you might obtain by joining in the first part of the service, but the hurried movements and the agitated feelings thus produced, disqualify you for profitably engaging in divine worship. And is it respectful toward God to manifest this irregularity? If your earthly sovereign were to invite you to an interview to be held at a specified time, you would take care to be punctual to the appointment: your determination to comply strictly with the invitation would be strengthened by the assurance that the interview would result in your decided advantage. 'The Sovereign of the universe invites you to meet him in his sanctuary, that he may there give you a renewed token of his favour, and another foretaste of the glory he is preparing for you: you will surely then abstain from whatever might indicate the slightest indifference to benefits so precious; you will scrupulously avoid whatever might be construed into disrespect toward your heavenly benefactor; you will anxiously guard against the faintest appearance of irreverence toward him; and by faithfully keeping your engagement with him, you will endeavour to show how highly you appreciate, and how eagerly you embrace, the opportunities of holding communion with him who is King of kings, and Lord of lords.

Let your attendance on public worship be prompted by an ardent desire to obtain that

spiritual good which it is intended to be the means of imparting. In waiting upon God in this divinely appointed ordinance, constantly keep the end in view; namely, your advancement in the knowledge and love of Christ, your establishment in the faith and hope of the gospel, and your acquirement of larger measures of that grace, in the fruits of which you are to abound more and more. For the accomplishment of these ends, the exercises of public worship are admirably adapted. In these exercises how often is the heart that was becoming lukewarm and worldly, penetrated with a sense of its ingratitude, and filled with love, and purity, and peace! how often does the believer, when harassed by temptation, or discouraged by a sense of his unworthiness, here regain that confidence and power which enable him to go on his way rejoicing! How calculated are the solemnities of the sanctuary to soothe and calm the mind when agitated by anxiety, or when disturbed by earthly cares! Here we are associated with those who have similar trials to encounter, but who are pressing onward with us to the same glorious immortality. The similarity of circumstances and of purpose causes a sympathy of feeling, and forms the bond of affectionate union. For those whose interests and whose principles are thus identified to join in the duties of prayer and praise cannot but be sweet, refreshing, and profitable. To listen to the announcements of divine truth, from one of like passions with ourselves, is an arrange-

ment suited to the wants and weaknesses of our nature ; the voice of affection and of earnestness giving utterance to the promises and precepts of the gospel, is calculated to reach the heart, to touch its tenderest feelings, and to awaken the most powerful emotions. An assembly of rational beings convened for such objects, and engaged in such exercises, is a scene which Jehovah contemplates with pleasure, which he visits with his cheering presence, and favours with his choicest influence.

That you may secure the advantages which may be derived from social worship, your mind should be suitably prepared for the duty. To enter upon it with the thoughts either wandering at random, or dwelling intently on schemes of worldly policy, will effectually close the heart against those impressions which ought to be received and cherished. Let prayer be previously presented, that God would enable you to worship him in spirit and in truth, that he would give you to see his power and his glory in the sanctuary, and that he would cause his word to accomplish in you the purposes of his holiness and love. Fix your thoughts, as much as possible, on those topics, the consideration of which will promote seriousness of feeling, and enkindle the flame of devotion. As you proceed to the house of God, you may appropriately and profitably meditate on the worth of your soul, on the love and sufferings of Christ, on the perfections of God, and on the joys of heaven. Mingle such meditations with

intense longings after spiritual blessings, and your mind, filled with hallowed sentiments, will sweetly relish the exercises of social worship; you will receive with meekness the ingrafted word, and realize its power to sanctify and save. While professedly observing the duties of public worship, let them secure an unbroken and devout attention. This is essential to its beneficial influence. Unless your *mind* be engaged, the attainment of spiritual good is impossible. Your minister would as successfully address a vacant sitting as an inattentive occupant. Probably it is in a great measure owing to the want of *fixed attention* that numbers who professedly hear the gospel are so imperfectly acquainted with its doctrines, and so feebly impressed with its obligations. By allowing your attention even only occasionally to be drawn off, you may lose the sentiment which would have been most peculiarly applicable to your state of feeling, and which would have produced the most powerful effect upon your mind.

To prevent your thoughts from wandering in public worship, you must make a determined effort to confine them to the duties that lie before you; nor will success be difficult, if you are alive to the importance of these duties, and feel a deep interest in them. Whatever deeply interests us, easily secures our attention: and if you habitually maintain a spiritual frame of mind; if your heart be powerfully and constantly impressed with divine truth, you will

have but little difficulty in attentively listening to it when announced to you by the ministers of Christ.

In the most devotional state of mind watchfulness will be necessary ; for without it Satan will inject foolish thoughts, and by causing distraction, render the services of the sanctuary useless. When you experience these fanciful suggestions, endeavour immediately to recollect yourself ; consider where you are, and in what you are engaged ; be determined to avoid the guilt of formality and hypocrisy in approaching to God ; and lift up your heart to him for grace to enable you to resist every temptation, either to forget his presence, or to disregard his word.

Unless you are destitute of a voice, or are utterly incompetent to keep time, join cordially in singing the praises of Jehovah. To remain mute when you have the ability of uniting in this delightful and exhilarating exercise, is neither seemly nor profitable. When this mute practice prevails in a congregation, it indicates a want of devotional feeling : moreover, the sentiments contained in the Methodist Hymn-book are so truly evangelical, that when sung with the spirit and with the understanding they cannot fail to enliven and elevate the soul.

Closely accompany the minister in the supplications that he may address to the divine Majesty. Give your heart's assent when he expresses the language of thankfulness ; and acquiesce with equal sincerity when he utters

the language of confession. Mark each distinct petition; make it your own, and testify your adoption of it by a fervent and audible, but not vociferous, *Amen*. This primitive mode of responding to public prayer, when practised within the limits of decency and order, excites a powerful but holy sympathy in the congregation, and has a most encouraging effect on the mind of the minister.

Cultivate a spirit of candour, and indeed of esteem and affection, toward your spiritual instructor. When the preacher evinces superior talents, and has the advantage of an attractive and impressive delivery, it is natural that your feelings should be gratified, and that there should be no backwardness in expressing the pleasure and profit you have received; but when a discourse displays neither profundity of thought, nor brilliancy of imagination, nor eloquence of diction, and when the delivery of it is monotonous or otherwise unpleasant, the exercise of candour and even of attention requires an effort, and perhaps a painful effort. In such cases, look not to the manner, but to the matter: if it be not profound, it may be important; if it be not brilliant, it may be clear; if it be not eloquent, it may be useful. Whatever defects there may be, either in the composition or in the delivery, if the preacher faithfully declare the simple truths of the gospel; if he manifest sincerity; if his evident aim be to do good, and not to act a part, he is entitled to your respectful and prayerful attention; and

if you thus give him your attention, he will be to you the instrument of good, the messenger of peace and consolation.

Hear the word in the spirit of prayer. Pray for the minister, that he may be divinely enlightened and strengthened, and that he may be the channel of communicating some saving benefit to every individual in the congregation. Pray that his ministrations may be eminently blessed to your own soul; and as he proceeds, occasionally make the truths uttered the subjects of short but fervent ejaculations.

Hear the word with self-application: make it the ground-work of a thorough self-examination. This is an indispensable duty. When a discourse is no sooner concluded than it is dismissed from the mind, it cannot possibly be productive of any beneficial effect. Nor should its profitable influence be made to depend either on its superior eloquence, or on its immediate impressiveness. That which may have been heard without any remarkable excitement, may, by after-meditation, be rendered the means of great spiritual benefit. The leading topics of each discourse should be brought to recollection, and should be searchingly applied to the conscience. And if the fidelity of the preacher, seconded by the agency of the Spirit, has either discovered your deficiencies, or convicted you of unfaithfulness, the language of penitential confession should be addressed to the Searcher of hearts, determinations formed of more entire devotedness to his service, and an application

made to the blood of sprinkling. When a discourse has been particularly blessed to you, when its effect has been to encourage your obedience, to brighten your hope, and to increase your joy, the event should be followed by devout thanksgiving to God, accompanied by special prayer, that he would give permanency to the impressions which have been produced.

Never lose sight of the all-important fact, that the agency of the Spirit is absolutely essential to render the preaching of the gospel savingly profitable. While you venerate the preacher as an ambassador of Christ, you must expect spiritual good not *from* him, but *through* him. View the preacher as an instrument in the hands of God; view God as the efficient cause, and the bountiful giver of those blessings which his word reveals. He, by his Spirit, applies his truth to the conscience; and by giving it energy and effect, renders it the means of conveying light, and purity, and peace. Ever remember, therefore, that it is to the Holy Spirit that you must look, and upon his influence that you must depend, for the advantages you expect to derive from the faithful preaching of the gospel.

Let your deportment in public worship be such as becomes the solemnity of the occasion. While you will carefully avoid whatever is formal and affected, you will be equally careful to avoid whatever has the appearance either of levity or of inattention. Shun the irreverent,



idle, and self-indulgent practice of sitting during prayer, unless you are in that state of bodily debility which requires it. Do not needlessly leave the chapel before the service is concluded; and even then do not rush out with unseemly haste. When mingling with your friends in the chapel-yard, or when walking with them on your return home, abstain from frivolous and worldly converse; to indulge in which, I need scarcely say, must neutralize the beneficial influence of the service. On such occasions, let the usual friendly greetings and inquiries be interchanged in the spirit of Christian affection; and let every subsequent remark be such as will tend to deepen the impressions received, and to strengthen the good resolutions which have been formed. Let the first moments of solitude be spent in prayer; and embrace the first opportunity of retiring to your closet, that you may there "inwardly digest" that word of life, which, if you receive it in faith, will be to you the word of salvation.\*

There is one social ordinance which, from the circumstances connected with its institution, and the obligations with which it is enforced, has pre-eminent claims upon your attention. I refer to the ordinance of THE LORD'S SUPPER. To the enlightened and spiritually-minded Christian, there is no religious duty so truly welcome as this; nor one so deeply interesting

\* The excellent tract "On Hearing the Word," by the late Rev. Robert Hall, and published by the Religious Tract Society, is well worthy of a frequent perusal.

and impressive. Superstition has surrounded it with a mysteriousness which it was never intended to possess ; veiled in obscurity that which was designed to be a specimen of perfect simplicity ; and given a stern and forbidding aspect to an institution which its Founder invested with all that is lovely, cheering, and attractive. 'There are many who, although they are not the dupes of superstition, are not altogether free from at least a remnant of its prejudice, and who therefore shrink with terror from the performance of a duty which they ought to observe with eagerness and joy.

The dread of "eating and drinking *unworthily*," and of thereby "eating and drinking *damnation* to themselves," is one cause why many, whose piety we have no right to question, absent themselves from this delightful ordinance. If *you* are influenced by fears of this nature, I must refer you to the chapter (the eleventh of the 1st of Corinthians) from which the preceding phraseology is quoted. An attentive perusal of it will convince you that the apostle is reproofing the Corinthians for crimes of which you are not likely to be guilty. It is evident they either partook of the Lord's supper as they would of an ordinary meal, and thus shamefully perverted it from its original design ; or that previously to its observance they ate and drank to such excess as to render them awfully unfit for any religious service. In either case they failed "to discern the Lord's body:" they entirely

lost sight of the great objects on which their minds ought to have been fixed; and neither thought on the sufferings of Christ, nor on the benefits which those sufferings procured. Moreover, although the crime of the Corinthians was awfully great, it did not irrevocably seal their "damnation." The word which is thus rendered, would be more correctly translated "judgment," as it is in the margin. The nature of this judgment is also stated in the succeeding verse, in which the apostle observes, "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and a considerable number are dead." For the scandalous excesses of which they were guilty, God visited some of them with bodily affliction, and others with death, as an evidence of his displeasure, and as a means of awakening the church to repentance and reformation.

That persons *may* partake of the Lord's supper "unworthily," is unquestionable; that by so doing, they may involve themselves in guilt, which, if not repented of and pardoned, will lead to their eternal ruin, is equally certain. But who are they that are thus criminal? Not surely the prayerful, sincere, and timid Christian, who is struggling against sin, and who dreads to offend God. No one in this state of mind can "unworthily" partake of the Lord's supper. Those chargeable with this crime are the self-righteous, the worldly-minded, and the hypocritical; those who, while they profess godliness, are either living in known sin, or

are sunk into that state of formality which indicates an entire destitution of religious feeling and principle.

Conscious unfitness is sometimes stated as a reason for non-attendance on this ordinance. This plea generally arises from erroneous views of its nature and design. It is not intended exclusively for those who are far advanced in religious experience. It is intended and admirably calculated to invigorate the feeble-minded, to cheer the disconsolate, and to strengthen the confidence of those who are weak in faith. It exhibits before them facts and truths, which, when spiritually discerned, unfold the glories of the Redeemer's character, and the unsearchable riches of his grace. In fixing attention on the love and sufferings of Christ, the believer is led to the fountain of purity and peace, to the source of every spiritual blessing.

Moreover, it should be considered, that those who are in reality unfit to receive the Lord's supper, are unfit for church membership; the same qualifications being necessary in both cases. And if you are entirely destitute of those qualifications, you are not only unfit to approach the Lord's table, but you are unfit to join in any of those ordinances which are specially designed for the edification of God's people.

The meetness requisite for the profitable observance of the Lord's supper may be summed up in few words: it is comprised in a sincere

and diligent pursuit of salvation. Are the blessings of salvation the object of your intense desires? Are you seeking them by fervent and incessant prayer? Are you convinced that it is only by faith in the atonement that you can be justified? Are you as anxious for holiness as you are for pardon? If you can conscientiously answer these questions in the affirmative, be assured of this, that the great Head of the church will not only cordially welcome you to his table, but requires your presence there as frequently as the opportunity is afforded.

One cause of inattention to this duty is the want of a due sense of its importance. There are many who have none of the scruples to which I have just adverted: they have no particular objection to partake of the Lord's supper, providing it will not interfere with some personal or domestic engagements. The truth is, they do not feel their obligations in reference to the ordinance. It is deeply to be regretted that those who yield to this spirit of indifference, do not seriously reflect on that command of the Saviour, "*This do in remembrance of me.*" This injunction is addressed to all his followers: he requires of them a prompt, cheerful, and universal obedience. If circumstances can render one precept more imperative than another, the circumstances under which this precept was announced invest it with the most solemn sanctions, and with the most powerful claims. Except in cases of bodily indisposition, or when prevented by insurmountable obstacles,

we are bound to its observance by every consideration of duty and of gratitude. Could no immediate advantage be derived from it, it ought to be sufficient for us that the Saviour has commanded it. If the observance of it be not attended with that visible and powerful excitement which some may deem so desirable, it should be remembered, that it may not on this account be the less profitable. In the stillness which accompanies the administration of the Lord's supper there is something peculiarly solemn and affecting: it calms, it elevates the soul, and separates it from all that is earthly. It brings before it the most momentous events, subjects it to the immediate influence of the cross, and enables it to taste of the pure river of the water of life.

Needlessly to disobey the Saviour's express command, is to treat him with ingratitude and insult. Be not thus guilty of pouring contempt on the authority of Him who laid down his life as a ransom for you. To neglect, from mere indifference, any of the means which he has appointed, is to deprive yourself of the benefit which the proper use of those means would secure. Act not thus injuriously to yourself. To allow considerations of convenience to outweigh the obligations of duty, is to act unfaithfully toward Him whom you profess to serve. Do not thus bring yourself into condemnation.

"This do in remembrance of me." From these words it is evident, that the design of the Lord's supper is to remind us of the love and

sufferings of Christ, of the benefits purchased by his death, and of our obligations to him for his infinite condescension and mercy. When attending to this ordinance, our thoughts should be fully directed to the crucifixion of the Son of God, which should be regarded not only as inflicting the most acute bodily tortures, but as being accompanied with an overwhelming agony of mind, caused by the iniquities of all being laid upon him. Having consented to bear the punishment of our sins, the manifestation of his Father's love was withdrawn; and he experienced, not indeed the remorse which arises from a consciousness of guilt, but the darkness and sorrow, the degradation and abandonment which are the fruits of sin. This was the bitter cup which he drank to the very dregs; this was the atonement which he made to infinite justice, for the crimes of a rebellious world. In observing the Lord's supper these must be the themes of our meditation, and the objects of our faith. We must repose deliberate and unlimited confidence in Christ as our Saviour; believing that he thus died for us, and that in his blood we have redemption. If we thus meditate and thus believe, while we are receiving the elements, we shall fulfil the design of the institution,—we shall “discern the Lord's body.”

It is evident that the contemplation of these facts will tend powerfully to impress our minds with a sense of our obligations to Christ. Our lost and wretched condition as sinners will be

brought vividly before us. We shall discover that by the death of Christ we are rescued from the gloom of despair and the depths of hell, and that we are raised to the joys of salvation and the glories of heaven. The emotions of love and gratitude which such considerations will excite, should be cherished, and be allowed to fill and to overflow the soul. Under their influence, resolutions should be formed of more entire devotedness to the Redeemer. No occasion can be more appropriate, for the renewed dedication of all your powers to his service. Bring to recollection your past sins and your past unfaithfulness; confess them; deplore them; and, with the cross in view, consecrate yourself afresh unto the Lord; yield your heart to him without reserve; determine that you will be more watchful, more prayerful, and more holy; that you will be more strenuous in resisting evil, and more zealous in labouring for God.

When the members of a Christian society are convened together for the purpose of commemorating the Saviour's death, they recognise each other as servants of the same Lord, as children of the same Father, and as bound together by the strongest ties of principle and of affection. From the nature of the institution, it is easy indeed to infer, that should any one resort to it with a mind filled with malice, or burning with envy, or inflamed with resentment, he will undoubtedly "eat and drink unworthily," and bring himself into condemnation. He who acts



thus is neither sincere nor consistent. He is guilty of an awful profanation of the body and blood of Christ. In approaching the Lord's table, personal animosities, secret jealousies, and unkind feelings must be entirely laid aside; and toward every member of the church must the heart glow with all the tenderness and ardour of Christian love.

The sincere believer will not need the ceremonials of a "week's preparation." Should he unexpectedly have an opportunity of thus testifying his allegiance to his Lord, his heart will be ready for the duty. When, however, the occasion is anticipated, it is necessary that it should be preceded by special prayer and self-examination, so that the mind may be the more powerfully affected with those truths to which its attention will be directed.

Except when compelled by stern necessity, never leave the chapel during the administration of the Lord's supper. Such a practice generally indicates that the scenes of Calvary have but feebly impressed the mind, and that they have been the objects of a very defective contemplation.

Let me, in conclusion, exhort you to a *regular* attendance at the Lord's table. You thereby declare yourself a disciple of Christ, and testify your attachment to the brethren. As a means of grace it is invaluable. It brings into operation those principles and feelings which are essential to the Christian character. It strengthens faith and brightens hope; it leads us to see

the evil of sin and the beauty of holiness ; it promotes love to the Saviour, and increases our attachment to his cause. It reminds us of our weakness ; but it shows where our strength lies, and directs us to the richest sources of consolation. It impresses more deeply upon us our obligations to God, stimulates us to a more active obedience, and quickens us in the pursuit of salvation. In making these statements, I of course mean that the Lord's supper produces these benefits instrumentally, not by any efficiency of its own. The papists call it a *sacrifice*, and thereby invalidate the one great sacrifice of which it is only a simple but impressive representation. In the proper sense of the term, it is not even a representation ; for there is no likeness, no real, no perceptible resemblance between the Saviour's sufferings and the elements of bread and wine. As being appointed by Him, these elements serve to remind us of what he has accomplished on our behalf. This is the purpose of their institution. The papists also ascribe to these elements an intrinsic efficacy ; considering them to possess in themselves a transforming and sanctifying power. This destroys the necessity of the agency of the Spirit. Without him to enlighten, to impress, and to operate upon the mind, the ordinance of the Lord's supper will be an act of mere formality, or utter uselessness.

Look up to God for the influence of his Spirit, and, assisted by him, punctually observe this sacred rite. Surely there is nothing for-

bidding in the contemplation of the Saviour's dying love; nothing terrific in viewing the foundation of the sinner's hope; and in these glorious objects there is surely enough to win the most reluctant, to enliven the most lukewarm, and to rouse the most indifferent.

For further information on this subject, read Mr. Wesley's sermon on "The Duty of constant Communion." In this discourse the nature of the ordinance, and the obligations connected with it, are exhibited with that clearness and force which distinguish the writings of the venerable founder of Methodism. There is also a more lengthened and very excellent treatise on the Lord's supper by the late Rev. William Orme; which may be read with great advantage.

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## CHAPTER VII.

SOCIAL MEANS OF GRACE (CONTINUED,)—CLASS MEETINGS, PRAYER MEETINGS, BAND MEETINGS, LOVE-FEASTS.

METHODISM is distinguished for the number of its social ordinances, and for the peculiar nature of some of them. Its love-feasts, band meetings, and class meetings are calculated to keep alive a constant, but pure and healthy excitement. It is by these institutions that it so completely adapts itself to our wants and circumstances, and develops and sanctifies the social affections of our nature. The con-

formity of these institutions with the spirit and design of Christianity may be inferred from their manifest tendency to preserve the life and power of religion, as well as from the very evident sanction with which they have been, and are still, favoured by the great Head of the church. Not only do they contribute to spiritual edification and comfort, but they bring into exercise those natural and acquired qualifications for usefulness, which might otherwise remain undiscovered and inactive. They thus ensure to each individual member his proper post of duty in the church, and prepare him for those labours which improved talents and more enlarged experience may fit him to undertake.

These services are, for the most part, held on the week-day evenings. And to the spiritually-minded Christian nothing surely can be more refreshing than to escape from the toil, and bustle, and cares of the world, in order to realize the blessedness of communion with God and with his people. The measure of attendance which is given to these services may be generally regarded as a correct criterion of the state of the church. When the week-night congregation is uniformly scanty, when but very few are seen at the band and prayer meetings, and when the classes are attended by a very small proportion of their respective members, we have, in such events, the melancholy symptoms of a general state of lukewarmness and declension. On the contrary, a regularly good attendance on these occasions is to be re-

garded as one indication of prosperity ; and is almost invariably connected with that spirit of prayer and zeal, without which converts will never be multiplied. To secure the last-mentioned object, the use of extraordinary means and efforts is, at times, both expedient and necessary ; but it is, I think, undeniable that new converts would be continually added to the church, would its members but diligently use the means they already possess, and faithfully apply those efforts which lie in the ordinary course of duty.

It is, I presume, almost unnecessary to state, that the social are not to be substituted for the private means of grace. Indeed, a regular attendance on the social means will, I think, be generally found connected with a regular observance of private means : when the latter are neglected, there will be no relish for the former.

If you are free from domestic ties and impediments, if you have the power of arranging and of pursuing your own plans, I have no hesitation in saying, that it is your duty to attend all the means of grace. To accomplish this, will at times, perhaps, demand the sacrifice of some personal convenience or gratification, and call for decision and self-denial : but decision and self-denial, in such cases, are never practised in vain ; they receive a present and a rich reward. Even your worldly occupation, when it *can* be left, ought not to be regarded as a sufficient excuse for not attending

regularly the social ordinances of the church. Although absence from the duties of your calling may not be so satisfactory as your personal superintendence, yet ultimately, perhaps, you will not find it injurious to your worldly concerns if you occasionally leave them in the care of your heavenly Master, for the sake of promoting the interests of his church, and of securing your own spiritual improvement.

When the claims of worldly occupation or of domestic duties are so imperative as to render it *impossible* to observe *all* the social means, you will, if earnestly seeking salvation, make those arrangements by which you may accomplish what is practicable. All that is practicable is obligatory: more than this cannot be required, and less should not be given. And if you are in those circumstances or under those restraints, which incapacitate you from attending any of the week-night services, you will find it not unprofitable to mark the hour at which your brethren assemble, and to make it, as far as possible, a season of prayer and meditation: so that while absent in body, you may be with them in spirit.

AS MEETING IN CLASS is, with Methodists, one of the conditions of membership, you scarcely need to be reminded of your obligations to attend regularly on this important means of grace. If you are *sincere*, the class meeting will neither be dreaded nor disliked. There is, perhaps, no religious ordinance more delightful and salutary in its influence on the

minds of those who diligently seek God, and who endeavour faithfully to serve him. As they have no motive for concealing their actual state and character, they can sustain the test to which the class meeting subjects them; they can, with frankness, humility, and gratitude, describe their religious experience; and in the utterance of their own feelings, in listening to the statements of their fellow-members, and in receiving the admonitions of their leader, they find themselves stimulated, strengthened, and encouraged; they are blessed with manifestations of the divine presence and favour, and return to their homes, cleaving unto the Lord with increased confidence, attachment, and devotedness. Such are the advantages which class meetings are the means of conferring on those who resort to them in *sincerity*; and those who realize such advantages will not need either remonstrance or entreaty, in order to secure their regular attendance. If they *are* occasionally absent, their absence will be the result of causes over which they have no control.

To the unwatchful, cold-hearted, and worldly-minded professor, class meetings are an unwelcome ordeal. His false pretensions, his superficial experience, shrink from the searching investigation: when he does venture to submit to it, his soul is oppressed with the consciousness of its criminal deficiencies; and instead of being filled with peace and joy, he is loaded with shame and self-reproach. Three alternatives lie before him: either he must rouse him-

self from his lethargy, and by prayer and faith obtain mercy through the atoning blood; or he must, by stifling conviction, and by silencing the reproofs of conscience, so harden his feelings as to render them impenetrable; or he must altogether discontinue his attendance,—a measure most generally adopted by those who yield to a spirit of formality and deadness. It is needless to say which of these alternatives ought to be chosen. That you may avoid the necessity of selecting either of them, be diligent, be earnest in private duties.

Some who are truly devout may be unable to relish class meetings, in consequence of natural diffidence, or peculiarity of mental constitution. I cannot, however, but think that these difficulties might, in most cases, be overcome. If you have to encounter them, do not quietly yield them the victory: Try what can be accomplished by prayer and perseverance. Look up to God for strength: strengthened by him, your nervous timidity and unnecessary self-restraint will depart; and that which is now regarded with anxiety, will be anticipated with gladness; that which has now to be borne as a cross, will be appreciated as a privilege.

Never absent yourself from your class merely because you are in a dull and languid state of feeling. When your temper has been irritated, your mind harassed, or your spirits exhausted by trying circumstances or by pressing anxieties, you are ready to conclude that by going



to class, you will neither obtain nor impart any spiritual good ; that the statement of your experience will neither be creditable nor edifying ; and by these, or similar reasonings, you may be induced to believe, that remaining at home is not the result of inclination, but an act of duty. Such are the devices by which Satan endeavours to prevent the people of God from using the means *best* calculated to remove the evils against which they have to struggle. It is to his interest that you should absent yourself from religious ordinances, when you most need their quickening and comforting influence. When you feel the repugnance adverted to, resist it,—conquer it. Resolutely perform what is obviously your duty ; and if it be a sacrifice, make it. Let those considerations which have been suggested to you as excuses for absence, be viewed as the strongest possible reasons for your presence. Go to your class, casting yourself on the mercy of God ; and you shall be rewarded for your obedience. You shall be able to give the testimony which thousands have given, who have gone to this ordinance with darkened, desponding, and reluctant minds, but who have returned from it with their burden removed, with their strength renovated, and their hearts rejoicing in God.

I need not say, be in time. The reasons which have been urged for an *early* attendance on public worship, are equally applicable to the class meeting.

If possible, secure a few minutes for previous

retirement. As you proceed to the place of meeting, let your mind be occupied in prayer and self-examination. Never premeditate a speech : let your statement be the simple spontaneous expression of your feelings. Use no high-sounding words ; neither aim at forming a finely-turned sentence. Let your language be such as will convey to your leader some distinct and definite ideas of the state of your mind. Avoid, as much as possible, those religious technicalities and cant phrases which mean either any thing or nothing, and from which no conclusion can possibly be drawn as to whether the party who uses them is a saint or a sinner. Avoid all affectation. Let both your tone and manner be perfectly natural. Speak as you would in ordinary conversation, on any subject which you felt to be of great importance, and in which you had a deep personal interest. Endeavour to throw off the restraint and stiffness, which it is to be feared are too prevalent, and which chill the feelings, and cause an unnecessary reserve. Let your whole demeanour be marked by modesty, humility, and self-possession ; and while you shun whatever might betoken an unseemly boldness, speak with sufficient loudness to be heard by your fellow-members. It is for their edification that you are present, as well as for your own. Remember also that you are not surrounded by critics and enemies, but by Christian friends : give them credit for kindly feeling and affectionate sympathy. But above all, realize the presence

of God ; and remember that it is to God, and not to man, to whom you must give an account.

In describing your spiritual state, be as brief as is consistent with justice to yourself, to your leader, and to your class-mates. Needless repetitions and lengthened details, of course, become tedious, and destroy the interest and utility of the meeting. In a large class brevity of speech on the part of each member is indispensable ; and in a small one, it is neither judicious nor faultless to make that a trial of patience which ought to be a source of interest, and a means of spiritual improvement. Providing your words are to the purpose, the fewer they are in number the better.

Let your statements be as explicit as will be consistent with prudence. The class meeting is not the place for proclaiming family grievances, nor for casting reflections upon those who may have treated you unkindly. Trials like these, if mentioned at all, should only be alluded to in the most general terms. If during the week you have received any signal manifestation of the divine favour, or have passed through any severe conflicts, it will be your duty to relate such events with a view to the edification of others. Some of the difficulties and temptations which you have to encounter, you may describe more particularly ; taking care that the details do not occupy too much time, and that they have also a manifest tendency to benefit your brethren. In short, if you are losing ground in religion, acknowledge it ; if you are

advancing, thankfully declare it. Avoid hypocrisy in every form ; conscientiously guard against exaggeration ; never misrepresent facts, nor pervert truth. But in avoiding hypocrisy, you need not be guilty of indiscretion : you may maintain your integrity, without violating every sense of propriety. Remember that you are in a Methodist class meeting, and not in a popish confessional ; and that your leader is a Christian friend, and not an emissary of antichrist. Should you have any painful anxiety on your mind, the precise nature or causes of which it would not be expedient to specify in your class, lay the matter before God, and make it the subject of enlarged and special supplication. If, however, relief is not obtained, and if the circumstances be such as to render judicious counsel desirable, you may in confidence consult either your leader or your superintendent : remembering that to enable the party consulted to form a correct judgment, the facts must be fully and fairly stated ; and that prayer should be previously offered that God would lead your adviser to a right decision.

In your choice of a class leader, you may probably have to be guided, in a great measure, by considerations of time and place ; but if these are matters of indifference, you will of course select one whose deportment and character are calculated to win your esteem and confidence, and whose wisdom and piety will qualify him for imparting seasonable and faithful counsel. When you have made your selec-

tion, steadfastly adhere to it. Never become a wanderer from class to class. Those who yield to this unsettled, roving habit, seldom, if ever, make any satisfactory progress in religion. He who is frequently changing his class leader is either excessively unfortunate or excessively capricious ; but most probably the latter. When circumstances exist which, in your views, justify you in removing from one class to another, previously state your intention to the leader, whose instructions you have been in the habit of receiving ; frankly tell him the causes of the arrangement you have adopted : if those causes have no reference either to his personal or official conduct, or to the conduct of any of the members, your removal will be the less painful to him. If, however, you have any cause of complaint, either against your leader, or against a fellow-member, you are bound in justice explicitly to state your grievance to the offender. This mode of proceeding will often remove the difficulty. But on this subject more will hereafter be said. Always treat your leader with kindness and respect.

Toward your fellow-members of the class, let your deportment evince the cordiality of Christian affection. I need not, I trust, warn you against yielding to any temptation you may be under to criticise the phraseology or manner of speaking adopted by others. Christian consistency forbids this. Nor will you, unless you are destitute of every proper feeling, ridicule the peculiarities which others may possess.

Neither will you harbour the slightest suspicion of the sincerity of any one, unless you have a certain knowledge of facts which justify it. Rather cultivate and bring forth the fruits of that charity which hopeth all things, which beareth all things, which thinketh no evil, but suffereth long, and is *kind*.

The ordinance which has the next claim on your attention is the weekly PRAYER MEETING. If, in the arrangement of Providence, there be an inseparable connection between the means and the end,—if the latter cannot be realized without the former,—then is a spirit of united, persevering, and believing prayer essential to the prosperity of a Christian church. To expect prosperity without prayer is presumption; and all excitement, unconnected with the spirit of prayer, is fanaticism. As the Christian cannot live without prayer, so neither can the church; and as the individual who most frequently and fervently prays will advance most rapidly in the knowledge and love of Christ, so the church, the members of which most regularly and cordially unite in the prayer of faith, will be most abundantly favoured with manifestations of the presence and power of Jehovah.

The spirit of united prayer, and a state either of discord or of declension, never yet existed together. Such a combination is, in the nature of things, impossible. How can they who frequently meet for the purpose of imploring blessings on each other, cherish a spirit of contention, or employ the language of recrimination?

How can they experience a declension in piety, who sustain each other by mutual intercession, and who thereby bring into exercise the most important principles and virtues of the Christian character? United prayer is the best remedy for those evils under which the church has, at times, to groan; and the surest method of sanctifying those afflictions through which the church has, at times, to pass. If, on the first appearance of the symptoms of disunion, the parties, instead of struggling and contending, would agree to refer the matters in dispute to God, the divine Arbitrator, and would strive and wrestle together in their prayers for divine illumination and direction, the controversy would soon be over, and "one mind" and "one judgment" would be given to the supplicants. Their views would, on many points, be reversed: things which previously had the magnitude of mountains, would have the insignificance of molehills; while what was previously regarded as subordinate, would be invested with a supreme importance.

The value of united prayer to a religious society can never, in this world, be adequately estimated, because the amount of benefit resulting from it can never be fully ascertained. Its blessings are not to be limited to those which are open to observation; but, considering the enemies to which the church is exposed, we must think of the unseen evils that are prevented by the believing prayers of a united people. Supposing these prayers to be discontinued, it

is impossible to tell how many instances of foul and disgraceful apostacy might occur, or what a death-like spiritual slumber would paralyze the church, or to what extent corruption in doctrine and in practice might prevail. Worldliness and pride would get possession of many hearts, which might otherwise be filled with spirituality and meekness. Satan would find his conquests both numerous and easy; either he would induce a state of universal lukewarmness and carnal security, or he would cause "grievous wolves to enter in, not sparing the flock;" or "from among their own selves" he would prompt "men to arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." But the spirit of united prayer enables the church to present a strong phalanx against the powers of darkness, and against the inroads of error and of sin. It scatters to the winds the elements of discord, and gives supremacy to mutual confidence and mutual love. It brings down copious showers of divine influence, which purify and enrich those upon whom they descend, and the fruits of which are exhibited in the growing piety, the settled peace, the ardent zeal, and the steady increase of the whole society.

The church is a living witness for God, the conservator of his truth, and the disseminator of its blessings. That this high character may be maintained, that the obligations connected with it may be fulfilled, that the honours awarded to it may be enjoyed, the spirit of united prayer must possess a pre-eminent influence,



and its importance must be *practically* acknowledged. And when we contemplate the state of the world, the gross darkness which covers it, the sensuality that enslaves it, and the virulent opposition to God by which it is actuated ; and when we look at the comparative insignificance of the number of *real* Christians, we naturally adopt the conclusion, that something more than merely human energy must be put forth, in order to transform and purify that living mass of corruption which the world presents. God has promised to pour out his Spirit upon all flesh ; but the fulfilment of the promise will be in answer to the prayers of his people. The moral destinies of the world are therefore, in a certain sense, placed in their hands. It consequently behoves every individual of them to consider his awful responsibility in this respect. Every member of a Methodist society who *constantly* and *needlessly* absents himself from the weekly prayer meeting, does his share toward banishing the spirit of prayer from that society ; he does that which, if universally practised by his brethren, would present to the gaze of earth and heaven the awful, melancholy spectacle of a prayerless church ; and pursues a course which, if universally adopted, would keep the cause of religion in its present feeble and diminutive state of existence, prevent the accomplishment of the divine promises, perpetuate the misery, the pollution, and the guilt of a world lying in wickedness, and multiply the number of the lost.

Seeing, then, that the interests of the church, the conversion of the world, and the glory of God are so immediately involved in this matter, let me prevail upon you to exert *your* influence toward promoting in the society with which you are connected a spirit of *united* prayer. We learn from the highest authority, that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much: from this it necessarily follows that the effectual fervent prayers of *many* righteous will avail proportionably more, and be attended with a proportionable increase of success. Who can doubt of this when it is remembered, that these petitions are addressed to Him whose distinguishing prerogative it is to hear and to answer prayer—whose “faithfulness is everlasting”—who “delighteth in mercy”—who “rejoices in the prosperity of his people”—and who “hath no pleasure in the death of the wicked?” What a powerful instrument for good do the churches of Christ possess in the presentation of united and believing prayer to the throne of the heavenly grace! And surely, if ever there was a time when the vigorous use of this instrument was needed, that time is the present; if ever there were circumstances which called upon the people of God to be united in this great work, those circumstances now exist.

Your own spiritual benefit will be greatly promoted by regularly meeting with your brethren for the exercise of social prayer. In the petitions that are presented your own wants

are specified, your own desires expressed ; and when blessings are supplicated for the whole society, you feel that you have a personal interest in them. While, therefore, you join in making intercession on behalf of your brethren, you will have the cheering assurance that *they* also are interceding for you ; and thus you will combine many of the advantages of private devotion with the exhilarating and sanctifying effects of united supplication. But the profitable influence which you will derive from the prayer meeting will not be confined to the meeting itself. United prayer will secure the divine blessing on all the other means of grace ; they will be accompanied with an unction and a power proportioned to the frequency, fervour, and faith with which the members implore the outpouring of the Spirit upon them in all their religious exercises. And unless this be done, there will be no genuine prosperity. Neither public worship, nor the Lord's supper, nor class meetings, nor band meetings, nor love-feasts will be attended with any remarkable blessing unless the observance of them be connected with the spirit of united prayer.

That this very important ordinance should be neglected and undervalued, is truly lamentable. Yet so it is. In many societies the weekly prayer meeting, instead of being attended, as it might be and ought to be, by a fair majority of the members, is attended by only a small minority. These things ought

not to be. Let not my reader contribute to the existence of such an evil.

To render the prayer meeting effective, all that are present should earnestly and believingly pray; the attention of each individual should closely follow the thoughts and the language of the person who may be engaged in the audible act of supplication; and, as recommended in public worship, you will, by uttering the usual responses, signify your adoption of the sentiments expressed. Do not, however, fall into the practice, which I have too frequently observed, of *mending* the prayers of your brethren; do not finish their sentences for them, nor make additions to them. They will do much better without such assistance, which will only embarrass them, and prevent others from deriving any benefit from the petitions offered. While responses, seasonably uttered, greatly enliven a meeting, it is unnecessary for more than one person at a time to be audibly engaged in the duty of prayer. All those loud and continuous expressions of fervour, which interrupt and drown the voice of the person officiating, should be avoided. When, however, a powerful excitement exists, and when it is evidently the result of deep and genuine feeling, the consequent confusion must be patiently endured: if it be at variance with your taste, do not resist it, nor absent yourself from the meeting on account of it. Haply you may be found fighting against God; and in attempting to root up the tares, you may also

root up the wheat with them. Not that I consider scenes of noisy excitement in prayer meetings as in the least necessary to the advancement of true religion, or as furnishing any indications of superior zeal. All violent excitements must subside : this is a law of nature : they exhaust themselves by their own violence, and the reaction which follows brings on a state of proportionable languor and insensibility.

That there can be zeal without excitement, is, I am aware, impossible ; and that the work of conversion must proceed much more rapidly than it now does, if the world is to be Christianized, is undeniably certain. But religious excitement may, I think, be so directed and moderated as to maintain a perpetual influence. There may be a zeal which shall not be the less efficient, although guided by discretion—an exultation of spiritual joy, which shall not be the less real, nor the less valuable, although it be awed and chastened by a solemn sense of the holiness and majesty of God. But those who think themselves sober-minded in such matters, cannot always have their wishes gratified ; and if we intend to do good, we must often consent to sacrifice our own feelings, and accommodate ourselves to the views and peculiarities of others. If, indeed, we withhold our co-operation until every proceeding is in perfect conformity with our standard of propriety, our co-operation, perhaps, will never be given ; and we shall incur the responsibility of refusing to act when the circumstances of the church de-

mand the exertions and influence of every individual member.

In revival prayer meetings there is frequently one source of disorder, which must not be condemned even by the most fastidious taste. I refer to the cries of penitents. To suspect the parties of hypocrisy before their hypocrisy can be proved, is flagrantly unjust ; and the most rational philosophy will, I suppose, admit the possibility of the mind being so overwhelmed with a sense of guilt, as to be constrained to give vent to its emotions in loud and bitter wailings. But it is not by penitents exclusively that the disorder of a revival meeting is created : it is often caused, principally, by those who, without injury to themselves or others, might practice a little more self-restraint than they seem inclined to submit to. Experienced and established members of the society are frequently the loudest in their acclamations. This is both unnecessary and injurious. A more *quiet* mode of proceeding would enable them more effectually to discharge the important duties in which, on such occasions, they ought to be engaged.

In conversing with penitents in a revival prayer meeting, ask them, in a tone of calmness and kindness, a few leading questions, for the purpose of ascertaining their views and feelings. If, from their replies, you have reason to consider them really awakened, direct them at once to the cross ; speak of the infinite efficacy of the atoning blood ; quote to them the pro-

mises of pardoning mercy ; remind them of the declarations concerning the death of Christ, and his ability to save. Urge them at once to believe these declarations and promises ; to cast themselves *now* on the atonement of Christ, and to confide in him for salvation ; and if peace should not immediately result, to persist in the exercise of this confidence until the assurance of pardon is given. It is useless to exhort penitents to believe, unless you also tell them *what* to believe. The most effectual mode of bringing faith into operation, is to place before them the object and reasons of faith. Solemnly charge the penitent never to cease praying and struggling against unbelief until its power is broken, and its darkness has passed away.

When you engage in the exercise of social prayer, avoid tediousness. Be short. Be fervent. In order to keep up the interest of a prayer meeting not fewer than six should pray within the hour. As it is desirable that each prayer should be preceded by singing, the time occupied by each individual should not be longer than seven or eight minutes.

Abstain from the common-place phraseology which is so often used in the commencement of a prayer. You need not spend time in delineating the divine character, which has, perhaps, been repeatedly done before ; but go direct to the throne of grace, and at once adopt the language of supplication.

I have elsewhere mentioned those objects for the accomplishment of which the Christian

should pray in his closet; and most of them are specially suitable for social prayer. To secure variety, it may be as well to select those which have not been adverted to by those who may have preceded you. All who officiate in a public prayer meeting should, however, earnestly plead for the conversion of sinners. Do not, in ordinary, make *yourself* nor your *relatives* the subjects of distinct petition: at home this is your duty; in public it is unnecessary and unseasonable.

Generally speaking, it is exceedingly injudicious to continue a prayer meeting to a very late hour in the evening. And although circumstances may at times exist, when the occupation of a longer period than usual is justifiable, yet even then, to protract the meeting to a very late hour is strongly to be deprecated. The exhaustion caused by such a proceeding prevents both private and family duties from being properly attended to. Those who occupy subordinate situations in households are not only involved in personal unpleasantness, but have perhaps to listen to blasphemies against religion, provoked by the inconvenience to which the family are subjected. Moreover, there are considerations in reference to young people which render their very late continuance at a prayer meeting both imprudent and improper. It is true, that by concluding the meeting at a reasonable hour, some penitents may go away with their distress unrelieved; but, if they are really penitents, and if suitable instructions be



given them, they may, I think, be safely committed to the care of that God who knows their sorrows, and who regards them with infinite tenderness. It will be better to intrust them to his keeping than that his name should be dishonoured and his cause needlessly injured. "Let not your good be evil spoken of."

The BAND MEETING\* stands nexts in importance. Where this institution is held only monthly, or once a fortnight, a regular attendance is incumbent upon you. Should it be of weekly occurrence, I would recommend you to resort to it as frequently as possible ; as frequently as you conscientiously believe to be consistent with the claims of your family, and of your class, and of the weekly prayer meeting.

The directions given in reference to class meetings will, for the most part, be applicable to the band meeting. As, however, in the latter you are not called upon to relate your Christian experience, let me exhort you not to be backward or reluctant merely because the matter is left to your own choice. Should there be a pause in the meeting, do not hesitate to shorten its continuance : your example may stimulate others, and a gentle word of exhortation against silence may not be without its effect. When you feel an inclination to speak, embrace the first opportunity of obeying it : do not wait for your elders ; such delays are neither expedient nor lawful. By continuing to hesitate you will

\* Band meetings are peculiar to the British Connection.—*Am. Ed.*

perhaps quench the ardour of desire, and be compelled to leave the meeting without giving utterance to your feelings, and consequently go away self-condemned.

The design of the band meeting is to assemble the society together, that the members may encourage and edify each other by "declaring what God hath done for their souls." These meetings also furnish opportunities for sanctified Christian intercourse, and for the cultivation of Christian sympathy and kindness. As their results are intended to operate on the whole church, they are an important and valuable appendage to Methodism. Let them only be duly appreciated, and their advantages will be manifest.

As LOVE-FEASTS are held but quarterly in each society, you will, it is presumed, be generally able to attend. They enable members from different parts of the circuit, and perhaps also of neighbouring circuits, to meet for the purpose of interchanging their thoughts and feelings, and of relating any cheering evidences of prosperity that may exist in their respective societies. By such statements other churches are frequently roused to exertion, and experience a happy and permanent revival. While in the band meeting the observations of each speaker should be generally confined to his present religious state, in a love-feast the means and process of conversion may be very properly described; taking care, however, not to repeat the same narrative in the

same place, unless it be at a considerable interval of time. The testimonies which are given on these occasions, and which develop the astonishing power of divine grace and the mysterious movements of divine providence, are often intensely interesting and impressive. Where is the heart that can withstand the melting influence of the plain unvarnished statement of one who has been rescued from ignorance, poverty, and wretchedness, by the transforming power of the gospel ?

Under proper restrictions you may find it to be both your privilege and your duty *occasionally* to embrace an opportunity of attending the love-feast of some contiguous society. Let your freedom in this matter be exercised with discretion. These excursions should not be too frequent ; nor should they be indulged in to the neglect of some other paramount duty. I have known some, calling themselves Methodists, who would walk several miles to a love-feast, but who would withdraw from the chapel when the Lord's supper was about to be administered ; and, although these might be only exceptions to the general rule, yet such exceptions ought never to exist. Call them not exceptions, but inconsistencies.

Although the brevity of speech which is *necessary* in a class meeting, is not equally essential in a band meeting, or in a love-feast, yet even in the latter you must guard against inflicting on your friends the miseries of tediousness.

If possible, avoid being *late* in your return from a neighbouring love-feast. If you have companions on your homeward journey, let your *conversation* be as becometh the gospel of Christ.

Let me earnestly recommend you to attend punctually for the renewal of your ticket. The QUARTERLY VISITATION OF THE CLASSES\* is a most important and interesting arrangement of Methodist discipline. It secures the advantages of a personal interview between the ministers and the people; it enables the former to ascertain the spiritual state of the societies, and consequently to adapt their discourses to those who are the objects of ministerial solicitude. There are, in some circuits, not a few who seem to make light of this duty, at least if we are to judge by the frequency of their absence on these occasions. I would assure such that they need not be alarmed at the prospect of meeting their minister, who would speak to them in a tone of Christian friendship, and in the spirit of a faithful and affectionate pastor. Their non-attendance will certainly give him less trouble, but not equal satisfaction. Moreover, all needless neglect of rule sanctions and promotes, to some extent, that state of disorganization, which has only to prevail in a church in order to effect its utter ruin.

\* This regulation is peculiar to the British Connection.  
—*Am. Ed.*

## CHAPTER VIII.

## ON THE DUTIES OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP.

IN the observations I have made on the means of grace, your duties as a member of a Methodist society have been to a certain extent specified: there are, however, others, the fulfilment of which is essential to your consistency, your comfort, and your usefulness.

*Let me first of all earnestly recommend you to get firmly established in those principles which distinguish the denomination of which you are a member.* Endeavour to acquire correct and comprehensive views of the doctrines of Methodism: they constitute that system which, in modern phraseology, may be designated *evangelical Arminianism*. This I sincerely believe to be the doctrinal system of the New Testament. I cannot, of course, enter into the peculiarities of this system: you will find them, however, most clearly and forcibly elucidated in Mr. Wesley's Sermons. To these Sermons I would direct your most serious attention. Read them with prayer, and they cannot fail to benefit and enlighten. Let the views which they unfold be tested by the word of God; and I think you will find them to be in perfect accordance with its plain declarations, as well as to furnish rational and satisfactory interpretations of many of those passages which are difficult and obscure. The last-named ad-

vantages will perhaps be more extensively derived from Mr. Wesley's "Notes on the New Testament." You will also derive great advantage from an attentive perusal of Mr. Wesley's "Preservative against unsettled Notions in Religion:" and on no account omit reading that admirable and interesting work, Watson's "Conversations for the Young."

At a time when the most strenuous efforts are employed to disseminate the principles of infidelity, it is especially incumbent on every young Methodist to obtain some acquaintance with the leading evidences of Christianity. The principal of these evidences lie in a very small compass. Here we have a number of books recording certain events. The people who lived at the time when, and in the places where, these books were first published, must have known, or at least must have had ample means of knowing, whether the statements they contained were true or false. Had they been false, not only would they have been instantly and unanimously rejected, but witnesses on every hand would have come forth to expose the fabrications which a set of designing men were attempting to impose on the world. But we have no such testimonies handed down to us; and for the best of all reasons, no such testimonies ever existed. The events of the gospel history were of too public a character to admit, on the part of contemporaries, of any doubt whatever of their existence. As, therefore, the facts of Christianity *cannot* be disproved,

the foundation of your faith is steadfast and unmoveable. And as for its internal evidences, when and where has a system been promulgated for the benefit of mankind, which gives a more correct description of the moral state and character of man? which supplies him with more efficient remedies for the evils under which he labours? which enjoins nobler duties, or inculcates purer virtues? which unfolds a brighter prospect, or which reveals a more suitable Saviour, and a more perfect God? All these are what man needs; these are what man must have, if he is to rise to honour and happiness. And, before you allow infidels to shake your confidence in the Scriptures, you must require them to accomplish two objects,—they must first demonstrate the falsehood of the historical statements of the Scriptures, and, secondly, they must supply you with a better religion than the one which the Scriptures develop.

Should you feel any perplexity on these subjects, remember for your encouragement, that no *honest* inquirer after truth ever yet became an infidel. To solve any difficulties that you may encounter, as well as to defend yourself against the assaults of the common enemy, you may read Paley's "Evidences of Christianity;" Paley's "Horæ Paulinæ;" Bishop Watson's "Apology for the Bible;" Leslie's "Short and Easy Method with Deists." "The Infidel's Own Book," by the late Rev. R. Treffry, is a most interesting and masterly production. You will also find all the leading arguments against infi-

delity imbodied in the first volume of Horne's "Introduction," and also in the first part of Watson's "Institutes."

The steadfastness of your faith in the fundamentals of Christianity will be proportioned to the earnestness with which you seek the blessings of salvation. If you feel your need of a Saviour, if you also feel the efficacy of his atonement, if your heart pant after holiness, and if you experience the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, you will not be easily persuaded that the gospel is a delusion, nor soon induced to renounce doctrines which you feel to be the foundation of your hope, and the source of your comfort. A firm belief in the gospel is so thoroughly identified with its practical influence, that, if the latter be unfelt or undervalued, the former will either soon lose its existence, or become a cold and speculative opinion.

If, therefore, you have found repose in that glorious scheme of redemption which the New Testament reveals, unflinchingly adhere to all its essential peculiarities, and strenuously resist every influence which would awaken your conviction of their eternal truth and infinite importance. If doubts and difficulties should be suggested, seek the removal of them by reading and prayer; if they continue to harass, state them to your minister, who will, most probably, be able to give you those directions which will terminate your anxiety; but above all, *search the Scriptures and pray.*



As it regards the mysteries of revelation, it may not be improper to observe, that you are required to believe them simply as *facts*: the *mode of their existence* not being explained, cannot be understood, and therefore is no article of Christian faith. For instance: we are not informed, and therefore we cannot comprehend, *how* there can be three divine Persons in the essence of the Godhead. But, if there be meaning in words, divine and infinite perfections are respectively ascribed to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; and yet we know that there is only ONE God. We are not then to inquire *how* this can be: we are simply to believe that it is so, because the Bible declares it. We are required to believe that a Trinity of Persons in the Godhead is consistent with a unity of essence; and in the exercise of this faith, we are required patiently to wait until the mystery be unveiled and the difficulty removed. This principle of believing a *fact*, without understanding the *mode* of its existence, governs our most familiar and powerful convictions. And if a man is determined to believe nothing that exceeds his comprehension of the reason or mode of its existence, the articles of his faith will certainly lie in a very small compass. On this principle he must relinquish his belief in his own existence; for man is a mystery to himself. I make these remarks in order to caution you not to allow your mind to be perplexed with those abstruse speculations which are too high for you, and the perfect

knowledge of which, in our present state, is unattainable. Some have meddled with these things, seriously to their own detriment, as well as to the detriment of the church of God. Novelties have been started which have multiplied the difficulties they were intended to remove, and the adoption of which has involved their advocates in the labyrinths of error. There are *no novelties in Christianity*; except what arise from the undecayed freshness and interest which its doctrines possess. and the imperishable beauty which, as a system, it exhibits. "Be not carried about with every wind of doctrine." If you have leisure and inclination to enter into a fuller investigation of the Methodistic doctrines, I would recommend the perusal of Fletcher's controversial works, but especially of Watson's "Institutes."

*Aim at the acquisition of fixed opinions on the subject of church government.* On this topic, volumes, pamphlets, and tracts, almost without end, have been written; and, as I think, to very little purpose. Some have zealously contended that the New Testament prescribes a model of discipline, to which all the followers of Christ are solemnly bound to conform. In developing this model, some have maintained that Episcopacy is its only true representation; others, that this honour belongs exclusively to Presbyterianism; and others, that it most undoubtedly belongs to Independency; and of each of these systems there are various modifications. The result of these conflicting views

has been to divide the church of God into sects and parties, and to place those in an attitude of rivalry and opposition who ought to have been unchangeably ONE in Christ Jesus. From my inmost soul do I deplore these divisions ; and ardently do I long for the time when they will cease to exist.

It is to be observed, that those who profess to draw from the New Testament views so very opposite on the subject of church government, exhibit an almost perfect agreement on doctrinal points. When therefore men distinguished for piety, candour, learning, talent, and patient research, form conclusions so very different from each other on questions of discipline, but who are ONE in questions of doctrine ; what is the inference to be drawn from such a fact ? Why, that there is no precise model of church government, adapted to every age, laid down in the New Testament. Had it been so, we may be assured that those who in other points are guided into a striking sameness of opinion, would have been led to evince something like uniformity of sentiment on this subject.

Some have attributed an importance to what they conceive to be the Scriptural form of church discipline, which has placed it very nearly on a level with the essential doctrines of the gospel. And yet these very parties have, in their own communities, adopted usages and regulations for which they can produce neither actual precedent, nor positive law in the New Testament. On being convicted of this inconsist-

ency, their justification would be that they had the sanction of some general principle which was obviously enough enforced. This, in my humble opinion, is *all* the sanction the New Testament gives, or was ever intended to give, on the subject of church government. General principles are laid down, which it is for us to ascertain and apply.

It is, I think, evident that the apostles, in their official proceedings, were actuated by a regard to the circumstances in which they were placed; and that their decisions were adopted with a special reference to the state and character of the parties whom those decisions were likely to affect. In short, the wisdom which is from above, love and justice toward their brethren, a steady zeal in promoting the purity, peace, and extension of the church, were the moving principles of all their conduct, and formed the foundation of all their plans. When a religious community is governed on the same principles, and in the same spirit, it is governed rightly, and its operations will be generally beneficial and successful.

That system of discipline is undoubtedly the most Scriptural, which most effectually accomplishes the great purposes of Christianity;—the discipline which, in the natural course of its operations, secures a holy, enlightened, and efficient ministry; most safely guards the church against the innovations of error and of sin; promotes mutual love and confidence among the people; unites them and their

ministers in the spirit of cordial co-operation ; and imposes those obligations, and supplies those motives, which prompt to the most vigorous efforts for diffusing the blessings of the gospel. The excellence of a system, therefore, will evidently depend more upon the spirit in which it is administered, than upon the form into which it may be organized. The wisest regulations may be laid down on paper ; conflicting claims may *there* be adjusted with the nicest accuracy ; power may be distributed and invested in the most equitable portions ; but if, in carrying out these arrangements, there be bitterness of temper, rankling jealousy, and an individual love of pre-eminence, the system, however well proportioned and beautiful in the abstract, will be worse than valueless,—it will be positively injurious. It will fail to realize the great ends of the Christian dispensation ; it will, in fact, bring Christianity into contempt, by presenting to the world scenes of enmity and strife, where perfect love and perpetual harmony ought to prevail.

In judging of a form of church polity from the evils which may be connected with it, caution must be exercised. The distinction must be drawn between evils which are inherent, and those which are merely accidental ; and before passing a sentence of condemnation, we must ascertain whether they are fairly attributable to the system, and are the natural and necessary result of its operations, or whether they do not proceed from the incapa-

city and unfaithfulness of its professed supporters, or from the violation of acknowledged principles, which, if properly maintained, would produce a decided and manifest preponderance of good. Moreover, all human systems are more or less imperfect. The difficulties which a community has to encounter, the disadvantages under which it labours, and the extent of its resources, must also be taken into consideration. Were we to form an opinion of the divine government, simply from the aspect which the world presents to us, we should be inclined perhaps to conclude that the arrangements under which so much physical and moral evil exists, must be bad: but we know to the contrary; we know that Jehovah's administration is uniformly wise, and just, and good; and that the miseries of mankind are not brought on by conformity to the laws of God, but by rebellion against them.

Should you determine to investigate the merits of any particular form of church government, endeavour to acquaint yourself with its *professed design*, its *natural tendency*, and its *actual and general results*: if all these be consistent with each other, and their consistency be in accordance with the spirit and purpose of Christianity, you will, of course, conclude that the system is both sound in principle, and successful in operation. "By their fruits ye shall know them."

It is neither expedient nor beneficial, that you should allow your mind to be perplexed

and unsettled by the diversified opinions that exist on the subject of church government. By taking into calm and candid consideration a few leading principles, you will not be long in arriving at a satisfactory decision. Having, in the fear of God, formed that decision, abide by it. Cleave to it ; support it with firmness. Be not induced to abandon it by a few difficulties : these you must expect : encounter them in the spirit of prayer and of faith ; sustain them with fortitude and patience. Maintain your deliberate convictions fearlessly, but meekly ; and let it be evident to yourself and to the world, that you have not joined a religious community, either to purchase the favour, or to avoid the displeasure, of any human being.

*Labour to the very uttermost to promote the peace of the society of which you are a member.* Peace is an essential element of prosperity. He, therefore, who by his example and influence contributes to the peace of a church, does something toward advancing the Redeemer's kingdom, and fulfils a very important part of the duties of church membership.

*Avoid giving offence.* Some professing Christians are lamentably defective on this point : they seem to have little or no regard for the feelings of their brethren ; and they recklessly speak and act toward them in a manner which they must know is calculated to grieve and to irritate. This is too often the case in meetings for business : should you become a member of such meetings, be watchful. One angry

expression may lead to most unexpected and painful consequences. If you are poor, do not, to evince your independence, address the language of defiance or of disrespect to your more affluent brethren. If you are rich, do not speak in a tone of contempt or of authority to your poorer brethren. "Condescend to men of low estate." On every occasion be mild, be gentle, be courteous toward all. Cultivate the meek, humble, affectionate spirit of your Master; and let this spirit govern you in all your intercourse with your fellow-members. When you are conscious of having acted in a way that was calculated to offend, or when you perceive that you have offended, though unintentionally, lose no time either in confessing your fault, or of assuring the party that you had no design to give pain. There is nothing servile or self-degrading in this: it is a manifestation of that manly and noble spirit which imparts dignity and lustre to the Christian character.

*Avoid taking offence.* Young converts, in the simplicity and ardour of their "first love," are apt to conclude that all professors are as holy and as consistent as they themselves wish to be, and as the New Testament requires them to be. But they soon find that appearances are often fallacious, and that the best of men have their weaknesses and defects. And if very high expectations have been cherished, they are overwhelmed with astonishment when they witness the first appearance of inconsistency,



or experience the first indications of unkindness. Be prepared for trials from your brethren. The apostle Paul had to bear them; but he did not on that account indulge feelings of resentment, nor desert the post of duty. Bear patiently with the unpleasant peculiarities of others, especially when modified by evidences of fervent piety; do not be offended, when there is manifestly no intention to give offence. If your temper be naturally proud and irritable, pray against it; struggle against it. It must be conquered, or it will be a source of perpetual misery to yourself, a ground of frequent complaint to others, and a serious injury to the church of God.

When offence has *really* been given to you, do not on that account abandon the church, neither discontinue your attendance at class. To condemn a whole society for the misconduct of one or of a few, is gross injustice. To withdraw from the means of grace, because a fellow-member has acted wrongfully toward you, is to add to the injury you have already received. Let not the wound which has been inflicted rankle in your bosom. Do not brood over your wrong, neither seek relief by telling your grievance to others. This aggravates the evil, and throws obstructions in the way of removing it. By this practice you also place yourself in a most disadvantageous position. By stating your accusation when the accused is not present to defend himself, you transform the offender into the offended, and become yourself an

offender. Go at once to your adversary ; kindly and respectfully, but honestly and firmly, lay your complaint before him alone. Guard against the use of language which might exasperate : frankly tell him your opinion of his conduct ; but at the same time assure him that if his explanation prove that opinion to be ill-founded, you will promptly relinquish it. Do not demand any acknowledgments which you cannot in justice to yourself persist in enforcing ; and be prepared to make every concession which reason and truth may require from you. This mode of proceeding will generally lead to an amicable adjustment. 'This is the mode, not merely recommended, but *enjoined*, by our blessed Lord. 'Take his own words on the subject : " Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, *go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone*. If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church : but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man, and a publican." O what heartburnings, what contentions, what divisions would be prevented in the church, if every member who is offended by a brother would but implicitly obey this clear and imperative injunction ! What a knowledge of human nature does it discover ! How honourable is the course which it prescribes !

Here there is nothing but what is practicable, nothing but what is reasonable, nothing but what is *just* to both parties. 'To conform to the spirit as well as to the letter of the precept, requires the exercise of real humility, but a humility perfectly consistent with a proper regard to our own feelings, and our own interests. It is almost needless to say, that when the second interview is necessary, the "witnesses" should be persons of piety and of prudence, who will be likely to take a clear and impartial view of the case, and whose opinions will be received with deference by the offender. 'To a Methodist, the other expedients having failed, the next court of appeal is the leaders' meeting.\*

*Abstain from evil-speaking.* This abominable sin is a frequent destroyer of the peace of churches, as well as a murderer of the reputation of individuals. It resists every impulse of Christian love, and violates every principle of common justice. It is a compound of malignity and meanness, of duplicity and cowardice. Whether it be the result of wanton thoughtlessness, or of deliberate malice, it is alike criminal and detestable. The whining cant with which it is sometimes accompanied, renders it the more insufferably disgusting; while the savage eagerness with which it is often perpetrated and listened to, partakes more of satanic malignity than of the peaceful and benevolent spirit of Christ.

\* This is true of England, but does not apply to this country. See Discipline, pages 45-47, 92-94.—*Am. Ed.*

As you wish never to be the victim of this most cruel practice, do not make others the victims of it by your own conduct. Never needlessly expose the faults of your brethren. I say *needlessly*: there may be circumstances when it will be your duty to state them. The church may demand it in order to the exercise of that discipline which is essential to its purity. The interests and happiness of others may demand it, when both are likely to be sacrificed, unless such information be given as will necessarily cause a withdrawal of confidence, or the termination of friendship. Justice to yourself may demand it, when you are called upon to vindicate your own character, or to enforce disputed rights. But in all such cases there need be no exaggeration, no bitterness; nor can you hesitate, if you are acting uprightly, to confront the individual. But it is in ordinary conversation that you are more especially to guard against the sin of discussing the faults, and injuring the private characters, of those who are absent, whether they be members of the society or not.

Should you be tempted to the commission of this abominable sin, you will find yourself enabled to conquer it, by honestly inquiring how you would speak of the individual if he were personally present; and also by inquiring how you would *like* to be spoken of by the parties whom you are addressing, if you were absent. These are queries which come home to conscience and to self. The sovereign remedy,

however, of evil-speaking is love,—pure, disinterested, universal love. If this divine principle were allowed to maintain its rightful ascendancy in our hearts, we should never be guilty of inflicting, either upon our neighbour or upon our Christian brother, one of the deepest injuries which it is possible for man to sustain. “Love worketh no ill to his neighbour.” It sweetly impels us to the constant observance of that glorious precept, “All things whatsoever *ye would* that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.” May the God of justice and of mercy write this law upon our inmost minds.

To both the innocent and the guilty I would earnestly recommend the occasional perusal of Mr. Wesley’s admirable Sermon on “The Cure of Evil-speaking.” The subject is also very comprehensively and ably treated in a distinct “Essay on Evil-speaking,” by the Rev. W. Shuttleworth, of Manchester.

Not only is it your duty to abstain from evil-speaking: it is equally your duty to give it your invariable and unequivocal opposition. Never be an approving listener to the tales of backbiters. It is easy to signify your unwillingness to hear them. If less intelligible intimations will not suffice, the best plan will be to propose that you listen to their statements on the express stipulation that you repeat to the party whose character is under discussion every word that is spoken against him, together with the name of the speaker. The announce-

ment of such a proposition will give a sudden and complete change to the conversation. A daughter of Eve once addressed a member of a Methodist society thus: "You surely do not attend the ministry of that Mr. —, do you? Why, he is —" Here she was interrupted by the following admonition: "Now mind what you say; because every word you utter will be repeated to Mr. — as soon as I can see him." It is needless to say that the intended communication was withheld.

Here allow me to observe that when you *do* repeat to another the censures which you have heard cast upon him, you are bound to give the name of the party who has uttered the censures, with full liberty to the accused to adopt the divinely prescribed mode of justifying himself, and of seeking redress. To withhold the name on such occasions, is not only wantonly to torture the feelings of a brother, but also to disable him from distinguishing friends from foes, and thus leave him to the risk of suspecting the former, and of reposing confidence in the latter. To mention the name of the accuser, and at the same time to prohibit the accused either from making any inquiries, or demanding any explanation, is to act the part of a malicious and dastardly mischief-maker, and to create enmity between those who ought to be, and who but for you would be, affectionately united.

Should a Christian brother request you in confidence to hear his complaint of the ill treatment he has received from another, it will be

your duty first to inquire whether he has endeavoured to adjust the matter in a private interview: if he has not, decline to receive the statement, until this necessary step has been taken. If it has been taken, and it be wished that you should act as a "witness" and a mediator, you may then, perhaps, without impropriety listen to the representation, providing you do not allow it to excite a prejudice against the party implicated. You must, indeed, suspend your judgment, and refuse to give any opinion, however cautiously expressed, until you have heard the accused speak in his own vindication. Whatever appearance of consistency and of truth there may be in the narrative you first listen to, you will probably find, on hearing the other side of the question, that the conclusions which you were previously inclined to think irresistible, are erroneous, and that the view you had taken of the case has not only to be modified, but reversed. To be obliged to retract a previously expressed opinion, will contribute neither to your own satisfaction, nor to the satisfaction of the person in whose favour it has been given.

If, however, an aggrieved party commences an appeal to you, respecting some alleged injury, and with the circumstances of which you are well acquainted, you will be acting the part of a "peace-maker" if you hear his statement, and, if it be in your power, communicate those facts which will remove the false impression under which he is labouring. Indeed, when you are

aware of any member of the church who, from misinformation or misconstruction, is dissatisfied with the conduct of a fellow-member, it will be your duty, even unrequested, to endeavour to undeceive the complaining party, by placing the affair before him in its proper light, and thereby divesting him of his groundless prejudices and resentments.

You cannot too highly appreciate the value of peace in a Christian society; nor can you be too deeply impressed with the fact that the existence of peace essentially depends, under God, on the spirit and conduct of each individual member. Your responsibility in this respect is fearfully great. However obscure your worldly station, you have it in your power either to promote or to interrupt that interchange of mutual esteem, confidence, and affection, which may happily prevail in the church to which you belong. By yielding to an angry and resentful temper; by the utterance of rash and offensive language, you may involve yourself in a fierce personal contest; and though you may know the time and the place of its commencement, yet you do not know, you cannot know, either when, or where, or how it will terminate. "How great a matter a little fire kindleth!" One solitary "root of bitterness springing up" in the church, may so disseminate its poisonous influence, as to "trouble" and "defile many." Let it therefore be your prayer, that you may never be the originator of evils so deeply injurious and deplorable. And that



such guilt may never come upon you, “put away from you all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, with all malice,” and “put on, as one of the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing and forgiving,” in the exercise of perfect love.

The existence of conflicting parties in a Christian church, as well as of the divisions to which they frequently lead, is to be invariably traced to a deficiency of the virtues specified in the latter of the two preceding quotations,—virtues which are inculcated in the New Testament with impressive earnestness and frequency. They constitute the foundation of peace, because they guarantee an unflinching adherence to the great principles of truth and of justice. Only let each member of a Methodist society bring these virtues into full development, and no unreasonable demands will ever be proposed, no reasonable demands will ever be resisted. Moreover, “bowels of *mercies*, *kindness*, *humbleness of mind*,” &c., are inseparably connected with active zeal; they are the fruits of that efficient agency of the Spirit which is always productive of deep devotedness to God, and of enlarged and enlightened views of Christian duty; they consequently ensure that combination and constancy of effort to do good, which allow of no opportunity for wrangling about abstract rights, or for insisting upon innovations of more than doubtful expediency.

Considering that the ministers and members of every religious denomination consist of men possessing the unavoidable infirmities of human nature, I do not see how it is possible for any community to be entirely exempt from the results of these infirmities. And if dissatisfaction is to be encouraged, and parties and divisions organized, merely because some measures are in operation which an individual supposes to be either defective or inexpedient, or merely because some measure is not adopted which he considers desirable or necessary, we shall discover in every Protestant evangelical community abundant grounds for remonstrance, controversy, and agitation. Besides, in attempting to rectify evils which do not affect any *fundamental principle*, the remedy may prove worse than the disease. This is the case when a mere error of judgment is opposed by acrimony of temper; or when the discontinuance of an objectionable rule or custom is followed by protracted and ungovernable contention. While therefore neither minister nor member is to sanction what he conscientiously believes to be wrong, sound judgment must be exercised in discriminating between that which is wrong as a matter of opinion or as a measure of expediency, and that which is wrong on account of its palpable opposition to the spirit and precepts of the New Testament. On the latter grounds our resistance can neither be too honest nor too meek; in reference to the former it will often be our *duty* to surrender

our opinions, and to sacrifice our feelings, for the sake of preserving the peace of the church. For the loss of this peace, I can conceive of no consequent advantages which can supply an adequate compensation.

Far be it from me to say that the repeal of old laws, or the introduction of new measures, may not, in some cases, be wisely recommended. Such alterations, when they do not violate any fundamental principle, and when they are clearly of a beneficial tendency, ought to be adopted. And to secure their adoption, it may be necessary to impart information, with the view of removing objections, and of obtaining the consent and co-operation of all parties. This information must, of course, be tendered in the spirit of love, and communicated through legitimate channels, and accompanied by legitimate sanctions. In short, a right object must be aimed at by the use of right means; and if such means cannot peaceably secure it, the only course prescribed by duty and sound policy is, to abandon it.

If you and the society or connection to which you may belong should come to a disagreement on any point, your sanction or conformity to which is incompatible with the dictates of a good conscience, or by which your peace is seriously and permanently disturbed, your spiritual improvement retarded, and your usefulness impaired, it will then be your duty to secede; and to do so without endeavouring to infect others with the dissatisfaction under

which you labour, unless, indeed, you believe their eternal interests to be involved in the question. The most unequivocal mode of expressing our abhorrence of false doctrines is to separate from those who inculcate them. The most decided opposition we can give to what we consider to be fundamental errors in church government is to relinquish all connection with those who maintain them.

Never lend yourself to any proceedings, the obvious tendency of which is to generate discord and division in the church on points not essential to its purity and prosperity. To such conflicts and their melancholy results some may be reconciled by the exulting consideration that the object which has cost so many struggles is at length secured; but while contemplating the achievements of victory, it may be as well also to survey its desolations. It may be as well to think of the numbers whose minds have been irritated and disgusted by these unhappy contentions, and whose peace has been lost, perhaps never to be regained. It may be as well to think, even if there be no organized secession, of the death-like torpor, and consequent declension, which almost invariably succeed a period of strife in a religious society. It may be as well to think of the scorn with which the world observes these scenes of religious animosity, and the occasion of triumph which they furnish to the enemies of truth. It may be as well also to remember that the wrathful controversies of Christians,

pierce the Saviour's heart with an additional wound ; nor is that wound the less agonizing, nor the less cruel, for having been inflicted "in the house of his friends."

*Let your feelings and your conduct toward your ministers be strictly regulated by the precepts of the New Testament.* 'The pastoral office is of divine appointment, and it therefore claims your profound respect. It is designed for the spiritual edification of the people of God : you therefore, as one of them, are bound to cherish ardent affection toward those who proclaim to you the word of life. 'They are instrumental in conveying to you the richest blessings which you can possibly enjoy ; and while the great Giver of these blessings demands your highest praise, you are not to regard with prejudice and contempt the men whom he employs as the messengers of his mercy.

A poor deluded papist renders a submission and reposes a confidence in his priest, which is as inconsistent with moral freedom and common sense, as it is inimical to the interests of truth and piety. But, while you condemn the slavish prostration of intellect demanded by the priestly arrogance of the Church of Rome, you must guard against the opposite extreme of despising those "who are over you in the Lord, and admonish you." That the New Testament invests Christian ministers with authority is unquestionable, inasmuch as it enjoins obedience to their instructions as a part of Christian duty. To specify the legitimate extent of ministerial

power on the one hand, or to define the precise limits of obedience due to it on the other, is impossible. These are points which the Scriptures have wisely left undetermined; but they are points respecting which no difficulties will be experienced, where ministers and people are bound together by mutual confidence and affection. Certain it is that neither the one nor the other is designed to interfere with the dictates of conscience, or to trample upon the rights of private judgment: these great prerogatives, as they constitute the principal foundations of man's responsibility to God, must be maintained inviolate. But they must be maintained in the spirit of meekness and of love. The rights of freedom may be advocated and exercised in the spirit of most absolute tyranny. There is the despotism of the *many* as well as of the *few*. Some, evidently misunderstanding the mutual obligations of pastor and people, seem to think that their independence cannot be upheld, unless they multiply occasions of either disregarding or opposing the views of their ministers; and they seem also to think that the more frequently those views are thwarted, the more effectually do they advance the cause of religious liberty. Indeed, if the feelings and sentiments which are occasionally manifested be correct, the people are appointed to watch over their ministers, and not the ministers to watch over the people. But when ministerial conduct is viewed with unceasing suspicion, and judged of with unsparing seve-

rity, when the most insignificant matters must be so guarded and managed as to prevent any encroachment on what are termed popular rights, it is impossible that there can be either peace or prosperity. There is, in such cases, a want of that confidence which is essential to cordial co-operation, attention is withdrawn from objects of infinite importance, and fixed on things that are comparatively worthless; moreover, there is generally in connection with such feelings, a want of that purity of heart and spirituality of mind, without which outward duties will be unaccepted and unblessed. Those who have been distinguished for eminent piety have almost invariably been distinguished for ardent attachment and deep respect toward the ministers of the gospel.

When ministers are deprived of their Scriptural authority and influence, their sense of responsibility is proportionably lessened; the obligations of duty are in consequence but feebly felt, and thus one powerful and necessary stimulus to exertion becomes extinct. Besides, when a minister finds himself eagerly opposed and eagerly censured, and that his feelings are not deemed worthy of the least consideration, his mind becomes discouraged, and his affections alienated; duty becomes a task, and labour a toil. Undoubtedly every minister is bound to cultivate the affections of the people: the people are equally bound to cultivate the affections of their minister. He also is a man: he is therefore as likely to be

affected by their conduct toward him, as they are by his conduct toward them. Nor can it be imagined with what cheerful zeal, with what ready self-denial, with what delightful expectations, and with what *certain success*, a minister will prosecute his labours, when he discovers that he has the confidence, the respect, the attachment, and the prayers of his people.

Let me, therefore, exhort you never to allow yourself to cherish either groundless prejudices or unkind feelings toward your ministers. Let them see that they have in you a firm supporter, a cordial and a steady friend. Let them see that they are the objects of your esteem and affection. If such are your feelings toward them, you will on their arrival in the circuit [or station] "receive them with all gladness, and hold them in reputation." Whatever assistance or kindness you can render them, you will render it; and it will be done evidently as a pleasure, and not as a condescension. There are a thousand nameless attentions and modes by which you may contribute to the personal and domestic comfort of your ministers, and by which you may not only gratify their feelings, but relieve their anxieties. Heart-felt, considerate, Christian affection will never be backward to perform an act of friendship, nor in discovering when it is most needful and most seasonable.

If you love and respect your ministers, you will neither turn them into ridicule, nor expose their imperfections; you will neither encourage



nor retail the slanders that may be uttered against them. You will defend them against the false accusations of the malicious, and against the base insinuations of the envious. Knowing that the usefulness of your ministers depends, in a great measure, on the estimation in which they are held, you will strenuously uphold their characters; and, should truth enjoin silence, with silence you will be contented. If ministerial character has been forfeited, remember the connection has the power of exercising the needful discipline: this ought to satisfy.

Let your affection for your ministers be evinced by cordially co-operating with them in carrying out plans of usefulness. No professions of attachment on the part of a people are of the least value, if their ministers, in order to secure their exertions, must repeatedly use remonstrance and importunity.

If you truly love your ministers, you will pray for them; in private, as well as in social meetings, you will implore the divine blessing on them and on their labours. They have anxieties which you cannot feel; trials of which you know nothing: against them the enemy of souls directs his most subtle and powerful assaults. Pray for your ministers, that they may be preserved from evil, and that their faith and love and usefulness may abound more and more; pray for a blessing on their family connections, and that wherever they go the presence and power of God may go with them,

and enable them to make known the savour of his name in every place.

If your love to your ministers be consistent, you will love them for their work's sake. You will regard them as "ambassadors for Christ," as "stewards of the mysteries of God." So far as character is concerned, you will give superior respect to superior excellence: without doing injustice to any, you will naturally cherish the highest regard toward those who manifest the most fervent piety, and the most active zeal. In thus yielding to the influence of moral worth, you will act justly and wisely. And while you will overlook minor defects, when they are outnumbered and outshone by the sterling qualities of real religion, you will not give your commendation and esteem to those whose defects are as prominent as their excellences. It will not be because a minister panders to certain prejudices, or because he is a good table companion, or a clever teller of anecdotes, that you will give him your regard; neither will you be induced to believe that singularity of dress, or slovenliness of appearance, or any other eccentricity, is the least proof of superior wisdom. You will love him most for his deep piety, for his manifest possession of the mind of Christ, and for his entire devotedness to the service of God.

If your love to your ministers be sincere, you will exert your ability and your influence toward securing for them a liberal support. Awful indeed is the condemnation of him who

enters the ministry for the sake of filthy lucre : such instances among Methodists are, I firmly believe, extremely rare. That those who are exclusively employed in preaching the gospel are entitled to "live by the gospel," is, I think, clearly affirmed in the New Testament. There are, however, some who seem to suppose that the means by which ministers are to live, can hardly be too limited; and there are others who seem to think that the allowance is abundant, if, with very strict economy, it be just sufficient to procure food and clothing. It should be remembered that if a minister is not liable to the losses of trade, neither has he the opportunity of accumulating its gains. And if his previous situation gave no promise of worldly advancement, yet, if he possess qualifications for the ministry, and be called upon to consecrate them to the service of the church, he is justly entitled to whatever temporal advantages his change of occupation may confer. As for improper inducements being held out, and improper motives being encouraged, it is obvious that these are evils which cannot be prevented by a low salary, unless it be lower than the lowest amount of wages received by the mechanic or the day-labourer; as whatever is above this, may become a temptation to numbers. Some would advocate the practice of giving a scanty salary to ministers, in order to keep them humble; forgetting that a light purse is often possessed by a proud spirit. Moreover, covetousness is as great a sin as pride; and I know of

nothing more likely to generate this odious vice, than that excessive carefulness which is rendered necessary by inadequate pecuniary resources. The truth is, the minister who will not be humble, and spiritual, and zealous, unless he be made constantly to feel the inconveniences of poverty, is not *sincere*, and therefore not fit for his office.

I ground the claim of liberal support for ministers, not only on New Testament authority, but on the following facts:—A minister has none of the opportunities of trade; he has nevertheless to keep up a respectable appearance: his people require this. He must enable his children to earn their livelihood, by preparing them for some occupation. If he must preach so as to meet the demands of the present day, he must *read*; and if he is to read, he must have books; and books cannot be had without money. The books in a minister's library should not be merely such as may be read through and then laid aside; they should chiefly consist of works of reference, and these are the most expensive. And, lastly, he ought to have the power of exemplifying the spirit of Christianity by acts of private benevolence, and by subscriptions to religious and charitable institutions. If a scanty salary deprives him of the means of doing much evil, it also deprives him of the means of doing much good. Let your example, therefore, evince a liberal spirit in the support of your ministers, and let your influence be exerted to promote it in

others. You may not be able to do much, in your own estimation ; but if you do what you can, you will do much in the estimation of God.

*In fixing the amount of your contributions to the cause of religion and of social happiness, compare your necessities with your resources,—at the same time keeping in view your accountability to God.* Supposing you to possess the ability, you are bound to give your cheerful support, not only to your ministers, but to the various funds and institutions of Methodism. Some of these are designed to give increased efficiency to the gospel at home ; and others, to extend its influence and multiply its converts abroad. You will be acting like a wise and faithful steward, if you acquaint yourself with the respective claims of these institutions ; and if you have sufficient to spare for distribution, you will do well to divide your donations among them in such proportions as an enlightened judgment may dictate. The amount of pecuniary support given to the cause of religion should not depend on caprices and impulses, but should be the result of conscientious conviction, yea, I will venture to say, of cool and deliberate calculation. In other words, a sense of duty should be the governing principle. Our duty is proportioned to the extent of our resources, and the demands upon them ; and if God is prospering you in business, or has given you affluence without labouring for its acquisition, you are bound in principle, in gratitude, and in justice, to contribute much, yea,

very much to the cause of Christianity. I need not request you to read Harris's "Mammon," and Treflry on "Covetousness." Consider the station you occupy in the sight of God, as a possessor of property. Be it little or be it much, it is a talent committed to your trust; and for the use of which a strict account must be given. You will have to give an account of the management of your income: if it be large, it is equally criminal to squander it by improvidence, or to hoard it in the spirit of avarice. If it be small, and yet not so small but something might be spared out of it for religion, were prudence and economy exercised, God will expect you to spare that "something." In considering these matters, believe in the reality of a judgment to come; and ask yourself in what light the wealth of this world will be viewed *then*, and whether you will *then* regret any act of self-denial to which you may now submit, that you may be able more liberally to support the cause of God. This is too seldom regarded as a *duty*. I know an excellent individual, whose wealth is considerable, and whose active, consistent benevolence, is beyond all praise. Many years ago, during a season of commercial distress, he one day announced to his family that, in consequence of the depression in trade, and the very severe losses which his firm had sustained, their household and personal expenses would probably have to be subjected to considerable restriction: "But," said he, "we will not *begin*

our economy by lessening our subscriptions and donations to the cause of God: other departments shall first undergo reduction, and every practicable means shall be adopted of preventing the necessity of making any deductions from the claims of Christian benevolence." What a splendid instance was this of the power of Christian principle! How many, in similar circumstances, would have deemed it right to reverse the order of proceeding!

May I venture affectionately to suggest to those of my readers who have to toil for their daily bread, that you probably owe *much* to religion for the improvement which it has effected in your temporal circumstances. Previously to your conversion, your earnings were perhaps spent in the haunts of profligacy: religion has made you temperate, prudent, industrious, and honest. You can now secure for yourselves and families, peaceful homes and many comforts. For these advantages you are indebted to religion: has it not, therefore, powerful claims on your gratitude? And ought there to be, on your part, a niggardly, reluctant spirit, in contributing to the support of those institutions with which, as a Methodist, you are identified? An individual who is not wealthy, who "works for his living," was not long since brought to the enjoyment of gospel blessings: he began to meet in class; he presented sixpence as his first weekly donation; his leader, who is a minister, thought it right to intimate to him, that from brethren in his station, so

large a weekly payment was neither usual nor expected. He replied to the following effect : —“ When I served the devil, his service cost me many sixpences a week : now I am in the service of Christ, I save all these sixpences ; and I think, sir, I ought to spare at least *one* of them for my Master.”

*Endeavour to be useful.* Your object in becoming a member of a Methodist society is first, to secure your own spiritual advancement ; but this is not all. By uniting yourself with the church you have solemnly consecrated yourself to the service of Christ ; you have vowed to be *his* entirely, and for ever. The weighty obligations you have deliberately taken upon yourself, cannot be fulfilled, unless you labour to the utmost in promoting the interests of that cause to which you are attached. One great design of church membership is, by the exciting and sympathetic influence of combination, to engage the people of God in the active exertions of Christian zeal. This object Methodism is peculiarly adapted to realize. Its ranks of travelling and local preachers, leaders, stewards, Sunday-school teachers, and tract distributors, furnish departments wherein each may find an appropriate sphere of usefulness. Whoever joins a Methodist society with the impression that he has nothing to do but to attend to his own salvation, has most strangely mistaken the character of Methodism, and has imbibed strangely contracted views of Christian obligation. Every one who is a moral



agent has power to do good. As a Methodist, as a Christian, you must exercise this power,—you must work for God. To imagine that religion consists simply in observing the means of grace, and quietly pursuing your ordinary employment during the intervals, is to suppose the religion of Christ to be a system of mere selfishness : whereas it is a system of enlarged, unbounded benevolence. It is a revelation of mercy ; and those who receive it, not only partake of the blessings of mercy, but are also rendered merciful. It infuses into their hearts its own divine tenderness ; it awakens, refines, and expands their sympathies, stretching them to scenes and objects that are commensurate with the world's habitable surface, and prompting them to aim at results which will be durable as eternity.

If you neither purpose, nor desire to be actively useful, you have not received the spirit of Christ. You have yet to seek your own conversion ; but if you have been brought under the power of the gospel, one of its first effects has been to fill you with an ardent longing for the salvation of a lost world. You think that if *you could*, you would gladly be instrumental in promoting this glorious object. Compared with the magnitude of that object, you may be able to do but little toward its accomplishment ; but, compared with your resources, your influence, and the limited period of your earthly existence, you may do much. You may be the means of converting not one

soul only, but many souls ; and each of these may be instrumental in saving others ; and thus you may proceed, calculating the successive results of a rightly directed moral influence, until imagination is bewildered and overpowered with the glory of the prospect. This is not dreaming. It is the sober conception of what is possible ; yea, certain, if, yes, *if you are faithful*. Be faithful, then. Impress yourself deeply with the obligations you are under to endeavour to be useful in the church of God. Carry about with you the conviction of your solemn responsibility in this respect. Let this conviction have an abiding, operative influence. Act upon its suggestions ; obey its dictates ; constantly believe that it is within your power, and that it is therefore your duty, to be *useful*. You need not be reminded that usefulness does not depend upon wealth, or talents, or eminence of station. A professing Christian may have all these, and yet not be useful. You may have none of them, and yet be the means of doing immense good. Your usefulness depends upon your piety. Eminent usefulness is always associated with eminent piety. Labour, then, after high attainments in personal holiness. Live by faith on the Son of God. Love God with all your heart. Love every human being as you love yourself. Continue instant in prayer. Be watchful. Be thankful. Walk with God. Walk in the Spirit.

While you diligently cultivate personal religion, endeavour, by habits of reading, obser-

vation, and reflection, to acquire every subordinate, but requisite, qualification for usefulness. Ignorance of the right modes of doing good often frustrates the best intentions ; and indiscretion frequently neutralizes the efforts of an ardent zeal. We are all liable to run into extremes. Our promptitude is apt to degenerate into rashness ; our deliberation into indecision ; and our cautiousness into cowardice. One way of preventing these evils is to study our own hearts, to ascertain our own infirmities, to cultivate the virtues in which we are deficient, and to rectify those peculiarities which may weaken our moral influence. We must also study *man*. We must observe the great principles of human nature as they are developed in the varieties of the human character. We must study the best means of gaining access to the mind, marking particularly those modes of address, and that kind of deportment, by which attention is most easily secured, by which the heart is most powerfully affected, and the judgment most thoroughly convinced. We must *read*, and the course of our reading must comprise such books as are calculated to enlighten our understandings, to expand our views, and to invigorate our intellectual powers. Nor are large books the only books which are capable of conferring these important benefits. There are many which are comparatively small and cheap, which contain lucid and Scriptural statements of Christian doctrine, experience, and duty. To give a catalogue of all the works

that may be worth reading, would far exceed my limits. Suffice it to say, that the practical writings of the old divines are, generally, the richest in thought and in unction. Select portions from the works of Howe, Baxter, Charnock, Hopkins, and Bates, may be regarded as invaluable treasures of truth and wisdom, and may be read with great advantage. There are also some modern works which possess the characteristics of sterling excellence. Such are Foster's Essays, particularly the one on "Decision of Character." The Rev. J. A. James's "Christian Professor" contains some most pointed and seasonable admonitions on Christian consistency and obligation. "The Christian Father's Present to his Children," by the same excellent author, should be read by every young person in the middle class of society. Cotton Mather's "Essays on doing Good," is an admirable and heart-stirring little volume, and is worthy of a frequent perusal. There is one little book that I wish could be read by every young Christian, "The Life of Harlan Page," published by the Religious Tract Society.\* He was not a minister; he was in humble circumstances; he had to labour for his daily bread, and died at the early age of forty-three; yet such was his love to souls, such his zeal for their salvation, that it was matter of ascertained fact, that he had been in-

\* In addition to the works here mentioned we would strongly recommend the publications of the Book Concern in this country.—*Am. Ed.*

strumental in bringing not less than one hundred of his fellow-creatures to the knowledge of the truth. O that the spirit of Harlan Page may fill the hearts both of ministers and members in every Christian denomination ! On the subject of reading, it falls not within my province to give further advice ; only to say, that if you have opportunity, you will give your attention to history, especially church history. Historical records exhibit man in all the depths of his depravity, and possess a far more thrilling interest than all the novels that were ever spawned upon the public : shun them as you would poison. However fascinating some of them may be in the perusal, two effects they will most certainly produce : they will unfit you for solid and useful reading, and will give you a disrelish for the active duties of life. They set the imagination afloat ; and enervate the mental powers : in short, neither intellectual nor spiritual energy can be maintained by those who yield to the temptation of novel-reading.

If you require guidance in the choice of books, one of your ministers, or some judicious friend, will be able and willing to direct you. Read and digest good books ; and you will gain that knowledge, and manifest that general improvement, which will fit you for any department of usefulness to which the church may call you. And when the church does call you, do not evince an affected or needless reluctance to obey the call. To decline for the sake of

receiving a second and more pressing invitation is insufferable. And if you really think yourself incompetent to perform the duties of an office, you should remember that the church is the proper judge on that point, and not you. At all events, it is your duty to try to serve the church in the department allotted to you; and if, after a fair trial, your incapability is manifest, you can then with honour relinquish the engagement. At the same time, check every feeling of eagerness for office and power: be not envious, be not disappointed, if others are preferred before you. In these matters, conform strictly to the discipline of the connection. Adopt no expedients, exert no influence, to secure your appointment to a more prominent station. In all these movements, there is a special providence, which will safely guide you, if you only seek and obey its directions.

Whatever department you undertake, enter upon it with a single eye to the glory of God, and in humble dependance on his blessing. Acquaint yourself thoroughly with the duties of the office which you may be called upon to sustain. Prepare yourself for difficulties and discouragements, and be determined steadily to persevere in the course of your duty. Aim at success; pray for it, and earnestly seek the wisdom, fortitude, and love, necessary to make you an active and sufficient labourer in the vineyard of Christ. If, for instance, you become a sabbath-school teacher, fail not to converse with the children of your class on the

subject of religion ; seek and pray for their conversion. Should you be a tract distributor, be not satisfied with merely exchanging your tracts, but, wherever it is practicable, inquire into the spiritual state of the people ; and, with affection and earnestness, address to them such exhortations as will be suited to their circumstances and character.

It is possible that your situation in life may be such as to incapacitate you for undertaking any of the offices to which I have thus adverted. You are not, however, on this account to conclude that you must of necessity be useless, or that you are exempted from the obligations of endeavouring to be useful. You may do much toward preserving the purity of the church. When you observe, on the part of any of your fellow-members, a neglect of the social ordinances, you may by timely inquiry and exhortation induce a return to duty. If you know of one who has been “ overtaken in a fault,” it will be obligatory upon you to endeavour to “ restore such a one in the spirit of meekness.” By acting wisely and faithfully in such a case, you may save a soul from ruin, and the church from disgrace. If you are aware of any opinions or feelings becoming prevalent in the church, which are either inconsistent with sound doctrine, or which are inimical to its interests, by conveying early intelligence to the superintendent,\* the evil may

\* The same as preacher in charge in this country.—  
*Am. Ed.*

be removed without any serious difficulty. At the same time, meddle not with the private concerns of others: "be not a busybody in other men's matters."

If, during public worship, a stranger should enter, and you should be sufficiently near, either admit him into your seat, or direct him to another. Attentions of this nature, rendered with an evidently kindly feeling, make a favourable impression, and secure for the stranger the privilege of hearing the whole or a part of a gospel sermon. Observe those hearers who are not members, and who occupy seats contiguous to your own: without having your own mind distracted, you may perceive whether they are impressed under the word. Take advantage of those impressions. Seize the opportunity of urging them to be decided. Endeavour to engage them to accompany you to the class meeting; and, indeed, whatever indications they may give, it will be your duty, respectfully, prudently, and affectionately to propose those inquiries to them, which may enable you to ascertain their spiritual state, and to give them suitable admonitions. Many who attend a Methodist ministry would be glad to have such inquiries addressed to them; and wait only for a friendly invitation to induce them to join the society; and many, it is to be feared, from the want of such encouragement, are lost to the church, and, perhaps, for ever lost. A cordial welcome given to a stranger on his first appearance at your class meeting,



will not be without its good effect. Whatever may tend to win the attachment, and to strengthen the determinations, of candidates for membership, is of real importance, however apparently trifling.

Embrace every favourable opportunity of urging the claims of the gospel on those who are unconverted. If all religious professors fulfilled their obligations in this respect, the cause of truth and righteousness would speedily become triumphant. If we had boldness, fidelity, and compassion enough to bear our direct, constant, and honest testimony against sin, sinners would be unable to maintain their ground; they would be overborne by the immense moral power which would act upon them. Sin is rampant, because it is allowed to go unreprieved. Sinners walk boldly and easily in the way to destruction, because the people of God, in their individual capacity, do not place before them any formidable obstruction. A mere profession is not sufficient; the impenitent are so accustomed to its existence, that they can behold it without self-reproach: nor is the deportment and spirit of many professors calculated to impress the ungodly with the fact, that there is a very obvious and a very alarming contrast between them and the real Christian. But unless we are more active, more courageous, and more undisguised, in our opposition to sin, its dominion will never be overthrown. The melancholy truth, I fear, is, that we, many of us, have not that full experience

of the power of the gospel, which would enable us on all fit occasions to declare, that we are "not ashamed" of it. We hesitate, we shrink, when the terrors of hell and the glories of heaven urge us to action : instead of fighting with the bravery of valiant soldiers of the cross, we flee from our duty with the timidity of captive slaves. We often dare not reprove sin, because we are conscious of our own inconsistencies : we expect, perhaps, in reply to our admonitions, to be taunted with our frivolity ; or, what is worse, our worldliness, our moroseness, our petulance, our pride. We must have that measure of the spirit of Christ which will bring into maturity and development the beauties of holiness, so that our conduct may, of itself, be a perpetual and forcible reproof to the wicked, and give additional effect to our verbal admonitions. The fear of man must be superseded by the love of souls. The dread of ridicule or of insult must be displaced by ardent zeal for God, and an intense desire to snatch sinners from everlasting burnings.

Again, then, let me exhort you to embrace every favourable opportunity of warning, admonishing, and beseeching the ungodly to flee from the wrath to come. Let this sacred duty be performed faithfully, discreetly, and affectionately, and God will bless you in it. If you thus endeavour to water others, you will be abundantly watered. Persist in your exertions. Let not the first injunction of silence, nor the second, drive you from your purpose ; let not

many repulses induce you to discontinue your efforts. A young woman, on being converted to God, directed her special attention to two of her associates, who worked in the same factory : they resisted, they scorned her expostulations. One day, as the work-people were leaving the factory, she induced her two friends to remain ; and conducting them into a room, she locked the door ; and telling them that she felt as though she could not leave that place until their hearts were subdued, she entreated them to join her in prayer : with simplicity and fervour she implored the divine mercy on behalf of her two companions. 'They were both, I believe, softened ; but one was so powerfully affected, that she gave herself fully to the Lord, and joined an Independent church ; from the respected minister of which I received this statement. Another young female, a member of the same society as the one of whose zeal I have just given an instance, on being brought to the enjoyment of religion, was filled with tender anxiety for the salvation of her father ; he had gained a dreadful notoriety for his wickedness ; and his daughter's piety became, of course, the object of his bitter persecution. Her remonstrances were in vain. One day, as he was passing the door of his daughter's room, he overheard a voice ; he listened ; it was the voice of Mary praying, in tones of agonizing earnestness, for the conversion of her father. The aged sinner was disarmed,—conquered. He accompanied his daughter to the class,

found peace, was made holy and happy, and, by the change wrought in him, he became an astonishment to his neighbourhood, but most of all an astonishment to himself. Have you no relative, no fellow-servant, no neighbour, no friend, who is yet unsaved, to whom you can address an occasional word of admonition? Are there none whom you can prevail upon to go with you, if not to the class, at least to the preaching of the gospel? Are there none to whom you can recommend the perusal of a book unfolding the plan of salvation, or to whom you can write a letter of friendly counsel, and of pious admonition? Let the answers which these questions must receive, determine your future conduct.

*In all the relations and circumstances of life endeavour to maintain uniform consistency of character.* There is one point of consistency which I must not forget to urge. You are possibly unmarried, and at present free from any matrimonial engagement: whenever you may form that engagement, I solemnly charge you to "*marry only in the Lord.*" O, what miseries have been caused, what souls have been lost, by disregarding this divine permission! Your purpose is to reach the kingdom of heaven: will you form so intimate a union with one who is proceeding rapidly to hell? Will you give your affections to one from whom you must be eternally separated on that day when the destiny of every human being will be sealed for ever? In working out your salvation, you require all

the aid which can possibly be obtained : will you place yourself under the influence of one whose example will never stimulate, whose counsels will never encourage you ; who can never sympathize with you in your spiritual conflicts, and who, in the hour of affliction, can administer no religious consolation ?

You probably think that if you should marry one not decidedly pious, your prayers and exhortations after marriage will complete the work, which, perhaps, in reality, is not even begun. Many have thought thus, and disappointment has been their portion ; and they have become the victims of their own folly. Moreover, where there is no promise of a blessing, which is the case here, it is presumption to expect one. Besides, to act thus, is to “do evil that good may come ;” and of those who adopt this principle, the apostle says that “their condemnation is just.” The volume of inspiration declares that “a prudent wife is from the Lord ;” so also is “a prudent husband.” Let the young unmarried members of Christian societies *believe* this divine declaration. Let them recognise the agency of providence in this momentous affair. Let them remember, that their happiness, their usefulness in this life, and in all probability their eternal salvation, depend upon the choice they make. Let them remember, that if they act with deliberation, if they exercise sound judgment, and offer up fervent prayer to God, leaving the matter in his hands, he will give them a partner who will

be to them a blessing on earth, and with whom they will share the bliss of heaven. It will not be improper for you to pray that your affections may never be fixed on one, to marry whom would be rebellion against God. Let every pious young man pause, and consider, and inquire, and repeatedly and earnestly implore the interposition and guidance of God, before he gives the slightest intimation of his regard to any young female. And let every pious female adopt the same course before she accepts the proposals of even a pious young man. If in this matter the word of God were only *believed* and *obeyed*, every union would be crowned with his blessing, and the result would be as large a share of felicity as can be realized in this vale of tears. Much more might be said on this subject, but it is needless. I may, however, be allowed to say, that in addition to fervent piety, good temper, good sense, with habits of order, cleanliness, industry, and economy, are in every station essential to domestic comfort.

Let your whole deportment evince the practical influence of the gospel. Do you reside at home, and are your relatives pious? Let them rejoice in your evidently growing conformity to the mind of Christ. Are they unconverted? Let them see in you a firm and consistent profession of godliness, and witness in you the beauty, the excellence of religion. Assume no superiority. Avoid giving unnecessary reproof: avoid sternness when its administration is necessary. Adopt not the lan-

guage of unseemly dictation. Let it be manifest to all that religion renders you both circumspect and happy; that it fills you with contentment, and clothes you with humility. Let your irreligious relatives see that your conversion, instead of alienating you from them, has strengthened your affection toward them; that it has increased the tenderness of your sympathies, and made your kindness more cheerful, more disinterested, and more unremitting. Thus will your conduct be a living comment on the gospel, and in all probability they will be "won by your holy conversation."

Are you residing with strangers, and filling the situation of a domestic? O think how much religion may be honoured by your strict obedience to New Testament precepts! Be scrupulously faithful in the performance of the duties of your station. Make this a part of your religion. Endeavour to be as perfect as possible in the department which is assigned to you. Observe the habits, tastes, and regulations of the family, and so far as they are not sinful, act in accordance with them, so that your employers may see that you study their wishes and their comfort. Be attentive to directions when they are given; thoroughly understand them, and implicitly follow them. Let it be your determination, as far as *you* are concerned, to wipe away the aspersion which we hear so frequently cast upon religious domestics. Give not that time to devotional exercises which *justly* belongs to your employers.

Be as diligent in fulfilling their orders when they are absent as you would when they are present. Claim no unreasonable privileges. Bear reproof with meekness, "not answering again." Sustain trials with patience. In short, let those with whom you live see how good-tempered, how teachable, how industrious, and how faithful religion can make you.

Are you an apprentice? Make God your friend, and Christ your pattern. Imbibe largely of the spirit of the gospel, making its precepts the rule of your life. Guard against selfishness, indolence, and pride; avoid every thing in your conduct which would bring religion into contempt. In all things be strictly truthful and rigidly honest. Be sober-minded; be clothed with humility. Let not the influence of others betray you either into levity or ill-temper; neither allow it to induce you for a moment to act inconsistently with your Christian profession. Be respectful toward your employers, and obey their commands with cheerful promptitude. Try to excel in your occupation; make it your study; endeavour to acquire a thorough knowledge of it, and to secure all the lawful means and qualifications which are essential to success. It brings no honour to religion when a Christian professor is clever and apt in every thing but his own trade. When the time is your own, you are at liberty to employ it in reading, meditation, and prayer; but when your business demands your attention, devote yourself to its duties actively and heartily; consider



it as a service rendered to God, and as the fulfilment of the course which his providence has allotted to you. Remember no situation is free from difficulties and trials ; and when you experience them, let the all-sufficiency of divine grace be made manifest. Toward your fellow-apprentices cultivate Christian kindness and affection ; let your deportment toward them be such as will enable you with propriety and with confidence to exhort them to seek salvation. Whatever reproaches, whatever disadvantages it may bring upon you, steadfastly refuse compliance with all customs and rules which either lead to intemperance, or give any sanction to vice. Commit yourself and your ways unto the Lord, and he will continually guide and bless you.

Are you at the head of a household ? Let all the obligations of so important a situation be faithfully discharged. It is both lamentable and humbling that so many of the children of professing Christians should grow up to manhood without evincing even a *respect* for religion : while some of these cases may not be attributable to any parental neglect, yet the majority of them are doubtless the fruits of it. Unless parents make the conversion of their children an object of deep interest and of diligent effort, they will never be the instruments of its accomplishment. Nor will parental discipline avail unless the children see that it is connected with the manifestations of Christian excellence. This discipline must consist of

the combined influence of prayer, precept, and example. When religion is *affectionately* inculcated, and beautifully exhibited, it will make impressions which cannot die, and excite emotions which will never be forgotten. As so many valuable works are extant on parental duties, I need not enlarge on the subject. My principal object is to impress upon you the great importance of domestic obligations. Methodists have been reproached for the neglect of them. I hope this reproach is, to a great extent, unmerited; nevertheless, in a community, inviting attendance to so many social ordinances, there is danger of overlooking the duties which belong to home; and when claims are multifarious, we must endeavour, in the fear of God, so to adjust them as to assign to each duty its proper place, and to perform it in its proper season.

As a Christian, and as a Methodist, you will be punctual in the observance of family prayer; and let me recommend you always to connect with it the reading of a portion of Scripture. Endeavour also to enforce those regulations which will secure the blessings of a peaceful and well-ordered household. In short, exercise your authority firmly, but affectionately, and it will command respect and ensure obedience; labour to promote the spiritual welfare of every member of your family, and you will experience the truth of that solemn and impressive declaration, that while "the curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked, he blesseth the habit-

ation of the just." Let me earnestly recommend to you the purchase and frequent perusal of that admirable work, James's "Family Monitor."

In every circumstance of life, and in your intercourse with the world, invariably maintain the *strictest integrity*. Let all your conduct to your fellow-men be governed by the dictates of sincerity and candour. While common sense forbids that you should make any unnecessary disclosure of your affairs, religion requires that you should shun the artifices of deception and cunning, and that you should possess that frankness of disposition and transparency of character which will render the purity of your motives unquestionable, and the truth of your statements superior to suspicion. In all trading transactions be scrupulously honest. Christianity requires this, and even more: it requires that you should not only be honest, but honourable, avoiding that mean, grasping, selfish spirit, which, if it can be indulged without cheating, cannot exist in a professor of godliness without bringing both himself and religion into contempt. Let all who deal with you, feel that they are safe in your hands, and discover satisfactory reason for reposing entire confidence in you. Take no advantage of the ignorance of others. Let no false representations be given, nor any false impressions made. Never withhold the truth when justice to others requires you to state it, although the statement may be detrimental to your own interest. Be strictly

punctual in your payments. Let no debts remain uncanceled after they are due. Guard against rash and extensive speculation. It is better to be contented with moderate but tolerably certain profits, than to be involved in the risk of reducing yourself and your family to beggary. That your credit may be preserved, be careful to proportion your personal and your household expenditure to your income. These are matters, in reference to which no occasion should be given to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme: if we are regardless of the considerations of prudence and equity, our religious profession will be condemned by the world as a disgusting mockery. The world's frown may be borne; but the frown of God who can bear? To treat the claims of creditors with indifference, or to incur debts which we know we are not likely to discharge, evinces not only an utter destitution of religious principle, but the possession of a heart full of baseness and hypocrisy. Would to God that the accusations of dishonesty, which the world often applies to religious professors generally, were altogether false. Let not your conduct give occasion for them. Take the gospel for your standard of Christian consistency and integrity; act in conformity with its precepts, and let the spirit of those precepts govern all your proceedings.

Manifest Christian candour and kindness toward other communities,—toward all who hold Christ crucified as their living Head. Your own connection has undoubtedly the first

claim on your attachment and support ; but if you have acquired enlarged views of divine truth and a correct knowledge of human nature, you will not withhold from other sections of the church the respect that is due to them, nor depreciate the excellences they possess : you will, on the contrary, rejoice that the gospel is preached in its purity by ministers of other denominations ; and according to your ability, you will aid their institutions, and wish them success in the name of the Lord. Cultivate cordial brotherly affection toward all the followers of Christ, by whatever name they may be designated. Banish every spark of bigotry from your bosom. Avoid disputes on subordinate questions of discipline, and on non-essential points of doctrine. Such disputes only engender animosity and widen the divisions which already exist. And real Christians can surely find topics of interest on which they agree, and on which they may converse with mutual satisfaction and advantage. Let me also warn you never to proselyte from other churches, nor attempt to create dissatisfaction in the minds of those who are comfortably united with some other evangelical community. If you can reclaim those who are deluded by soul-destroying errors, do so ; and if you fulfil your obligations in seeking the salvation of the lost, you will have sufficient employment, without needlessly distracting the minds of Christ's followers.

And now, my dear reader, " I commend you

to God and the word of his grace." In spite of many interruptions, in the midst of many painful domestic afflictions, I have at length arrived at the conclusion of a work on which my heart has long been fixed. Has the perusal of this little book been the means of establishing you in the faith, and of rendering you more happy, more zealous, and more holy? If such have been the results, my aim is, in part at least, accomplished. My last exhortation is, Press forward, persevere unto the end; "be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord."—Your trials may be numerous and severe; your duties may be arduous, and your means of improvement scanty; but if you are prayerful, watchful, and believing, you will realize the truth of the Saviour's promises, and the power of the Saviour's grace. As an incitement to continuance of effort, think of the contrast which exists between your course and that of the ungodly. While theirs is a downward progress in sin, and a constant accumulation of misery, yours is an advancement in holiness, and a pathway of pleasantness and peace. While they walk in darkness, you walk in heavenly light. While their end will be destruction, yours will be triumph. While they will be uttering the wailings of despair, you will be joining in the hallelujahs of heaven.



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